



Votive Panels and Popular Piety in Early Modern Italy

Fredrika H. Jacobs

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VOTIVE PANELS AND POPULAR PIETY IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

In the late fifteenth century, votive panel paintings, or *tavolette votive*, began to accumulate around reliquary shrines and miracle-working images throughout Italy. Although often dismissed as popular art of little aesthetic consequence, more than fifteen hundred panels from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are extant, a testimony to their ubiquity and importance in religious practice. Humble in both their materiality and style, they represent donors in prayer and supplicants petitioning a saint at a dramatic moment of crisis. In this book, Fredrika H. Jacobs traces the origins and development of the use of votive panels in this period. She examines the form, context, and functional value of votive panels and considers how they created meaning for the person who dedicated them as well as how they accrued meaning in relationship to other images and objects within a sacred space activated by practices of cultic culture.

Fredrika H. Jacobs is professor emerita of art history, Virginia Commonwealth University. She is the author of *Defining the Renaissance "Virtuosa": Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *The Living Image in Renaissance Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). She has contributed essays to a variety of books dealing with gender, aesthetics, and popular culture in the Renaissance. Her work has appeared in numerous scholarly journals and anthologies, including *Renaissance Quarterly*, the *Art Bulletin*, and *Word & Image*.

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For Paul, Jessica, Nick, & Peter

When we concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation,
the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into
the history of that object.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Transparent Things*, 1972

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The origin of this study lies in my further reflection upon a category of lifelike-ness, or living images, not adequately discussed in my previous book, namely animate sacred images. Here the principal focus is not representations of the Madonna that reportedly cried, bled, bruised, shifted position, or otherwise displayed signs of life but rather *ex-votos*, specifically small painted panels visualizing an act of intercession at a moment of personal crisis or commemorating a miraculous cure or rescue. In researching these amazing paintings, I have received support, encouragement, and guidance from individuals and institutions. The Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., generously supported this project both at its beginning and near its end. Villa I Tatti, the Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence, did so midway through. The richness of resources available at both of these institutions – in particular, the insights and assistance offered by the community of scholars at each – is remarkable, a true gift. I am grateful to Elizabeth Cropper and Joseph Connors for affording me the privilege of membership. I also thank Richard Toscan, Dean Emeritus of the School of the Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, who supported my research in many ways. Heartfelt thanks for walking me through collections, assisting me with translations, sharing images of *tavolette* from sites I missed, and engaging me in stimulating and challenging discussions is due also to Lorenzo Pericolo, Giancarla Periti, Ann Mullavey, Anna Kim, Catherine Kovesi, Steven Ostrow, Sara Matthews-Grieco, John O'Malley, Loris Pasini, Giancarlo Turrotti, Angela Federico, Simona Tozzo, Klaus Pietschmann, Gianfranco Ciprini, Francesco Ciprini, Ittai Weinryb, others named in footnotes, and still others too numerous to mention. Above all, I thank Megan Holmes, whose knowledge of cultic culture is extensive and generosity unbounded. Gratitude is also and as always extended to Beatrice Rehl for her enduring encouragement. Finally and crucially, I thank my wonderful family: Paul, Nick, Peter, and most importantly Jessica, a scholar and a *miracolata*.

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DIALOGUES OF DEVOTION: AN INTRODUCTION

Mediatrix nostra que es post Deum spes sola tuo Filio me representa
(Our Mediator, who art after God our only hope, represent me to your Son).
Frame inscription, Jan Gossart, *Carondelet Diptych*, 1517¹

Measuring almost three meters in height and nearly two meters in width, Andrea Mantegna's (ca. 1431–1506) *Madonna della Vittoria*, completed in 1496 and now in the Louvre, is a masterful painting by a master artist (Figure 1). It is also an ex-voto, an offering of thanks acknowledging divine intervention during a crisis situation. With grateful humility, the armored yet bareheaded Francesco II Gonzaga kneels before the Madonna and Christ Child. In accordance with long-established precepts for effective, communicative prayer, the Marchese of Mantua clasps his hands in adoration and raises his eyes to the enthroned pair elevated on a dais of variegated marble positioned beneath a sumptuous bower rich in fruits and populated by exotic birds.² Engendered by reason of a vow (*ex voto suscepto*) made to the Madonna when his life was in peril, and signaling rescue from that danger through the reception of intercessory grace (*grazia ricevuta*), Francesco's reverence – that which Mantegna represented as well as that expressed by the offering of the *Madonna della Vittoria* itself – is an affirmation of the efficacy of dialogue between a pious petitioner and a holy intercessor. Meeting the marchese's thankful gaze, Mary benevolently extends her right hand above Francesco's head. Christ, similarly focused, raises his hand in benediction. Positioned on either side of the Holy Mother



1. Andrea Mantegna, *Madonna della Vittoria*, dedicated 1496. Tempera on canvas. Paris, Louvre. (Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York)

and Child, St. Michael and St. George hold open Mary's cloak, allowing its protective folds to shelter her devotee. Like the Virgin and Christ Child, the two warrior saints fix their eyes on the supplicant. With this complex network of gazes exchanged under a talismanic branch of rose-colored coral, Mantegna conveyed the essence of the circumstances that led Francesco to venerate the Madonna in this way.

On July 6, 1495, the army of Francesco II had confronted that of King Charles VIII of France near the village of Fornovo, thirty kilometers southwest of Parma. Some two decades later, the ecclesiastical historian Ippolito Donesmondi offered a romanticized account of what happened that day and described the commemorative events that followed.³

(At Fornovo, Francesco) penetrated so deeply into the enemy lines that finally (he) saw that it would be humanly impossible to free himself from the barbarians. Thereupon offering himself with all his heart unto God and to the most Glorious Virgin he promised to build a temple in her honor if she freed him. No sooner had he made this promise then ... he saw the enemy ... turn and flee.... Returning to Mantua, and acknowledging this victory, [which he] attributed to God and his Most Holy Mother, Francesco built the church of the Madonna della Vittoria ... (and) Andrea Mantegna painted the altarpiece for the main altar, which ... includes a portrait of the marquis, who inside the church hung up the armor he had worn on the day of the battle as a sign of humble reverence.⁴

Although lacking the compositional and stylistic sophistication of the *Madonna della Vittoria*, a small painting – it measures a mere 22 by 32 centimeters – made in 1499 by an unknown artist for an unidentified individual, and now preserved in Lonigo's Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli with 352 similarly sized paintings, is also a work that came into being *ex voto suscepto* (Figure 2). As is the case with the Marchese of Mantua, the unidentified donor of this votive panel painting, or *tavoletta votiva*, is depicted bareheaded, with hands in prayer, and eyes focused on the Madonna. The anonymous painter of the Lonigo *tavoletta*, however, did not convey communion between supplicant and saint with a calculated web of gestures and interlocked gazes. Neither did he ennoble the encounter by setting the scene in some grand, otherworldly place. The painter used a simpler compositional strategy to express human accessibility to the divine. The votary kneels on the same ground on which Mary sits. Additionally, the artist relied on the familiar to convey the wondrous. The Madonna's weighted, earthbound position among notionally rendered stones, grasses, and flowers – as opposed to the striking array of fruits, parrots, and cockatoos pictured in the bower sheltering the Madonna della Vittoria – avers her *praesentia*, the affecting presence of the supernatural in the natural world. Reification of the divine is asserted further by the placement of Mary's left hand. Cradling her cheek, it not only identifies her unequivocally



2. Anonymous, votary in prayer, *tavoleta votiva*, 1499. Tempera on panel. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: with kind permission of Santa Maria dei Miracoli)

as Lonigo's Madonna dei Miracoli but also attests to popular belief in divine vitality manifested in and through sacred images.

According to early documents recording the history of the site, the painting of Mary that brought pilgrims to Lonigo, and which is clearly referenced in the 1499 *tavoleta*, did not originally look like this. The position of the Madonna's left hand, a *trasfigurazione*, was the result of events purported to have taken place on the afternoon of April 30, 1486.⁵ On that date, two shoemakers traveling the thirty-five kilometers from Verona to Lonigo conspired along the way to rob and murder a third in their company. Having committed the heinous crime, the pair entered a nearby church. There, they assumed, they could divide their ill-gotten gains without being seen. Yet, as the murderous thieves split the spoils, they became aware that they were in the presence of eyes far more observant than those of any mortal. A painting of the Madonna appeared to be watching their every move. Unnerved, they called the Virgin a whore and stabbed her image just below the left eye. Responding to the assault as if physically susceptible to the pain of injury, the represented Mary reached up to stanch the blood gushing from the wound. With unsettled fear turning to unbridled panic, the blasphemous shoemakers fled the scene. Five days later, they were apprehended and summarily executed.

Two days after the shoemakers were punished for their unholy acts, the miracle-working Madonna dei Miracoli, as she came to be called, was credited with safeguarding one Stefano Cavaccioni da Zimella from harm when he fell from his horse.⁶ In subsequent days, weeks, and years, hundreds of pious petitioners followed Stefano Cavaccioni's lead. The donor of the 1499 *tavoletta votiva* was among them. Having vowed to honor the Madonna dei Miracoli if she came to their assistance, petitioners whose health was miraculously restored and those who incredibly had escaped danger made their way to Lonigo to acknowledge Mary's compassionate attendance. Having reached their destination, they offered prayers of thanks and, in many cases, deposited before her transfigured image a material token of gratitude: money for alms, a candle, a wax cast of an afflicted but now cured part of their bodies, an article of clothing, an embossed metal plaque, a lock of hair, a no-longer-needed pair of crutches, and the like. For his part, the anonymous donor of the 1499 panel chose to recognize the efficacy of Lonigo's Madonna dei Miracoli with a type of ex-voto that only recently had begun to appear among the miscellany of figurines, anatomical casts, and other familiar votive objects left at thaumaturgic shrines throughout Italy. Although classical texts describing objects in sacred shrines refer to painted tablets (*tabulae pictae*), it is unknown whether the term refers to votive pictures painted on wood or to only the small, stone relief panels (some with traces of paint) dedicated to divinities of healing that have been found at some ancient sites. It is no less clear whether painted panels figured among the votive objects left at shrines by medieval pilgrims. All that can be said with certainty is that panels like those at Lonigo began to be routinely recorded as votive offerings in sanctuary inventories and cited in miracle books during the later decades of the fifteenth century. These same sources indicate a steady rise in their popularity over the course of the following century. Material evidence corroborates the written record. More than fifteen hundred fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *tavolette votive* are extant in civic museums and at thaumaturgic sites throughout Italy.

Although painted within five years of one another, the Lonigo panel and Mantegna's canvas appear at first glance to have little in common other than the dates of their making and dedications. Scale and style are obvious distinguishing factors. One is monumental, the other small. Stylistically, the subtle yet highly expressive relationship of figures in Mantegna's Madonna della Vittoria is absent from the picture painted anonymously and dedicated to the Madonna dei Miracoli. The tavoletta also lacks Mantegna's fine modulation of form, his virtuosic rendering of surfaces painted to simulate a variety of materials. Absent, too, is the master's conveyance of depth. In Madonna della Vittoria space is defined by projecting limbs, illusionistic structures, and the diagonal positioning of figures. By contrast, the unknown painter of the Lonigo tavoletta depicted the Madonna frontally and rendered the votary in

rigid profile, delineating the form and features of both with an insistent black line that reasserts the flatness of the panel's surface. The same heavy line was employed to mark the horizon of a landscape setting that is only suggested with notational brushstrokes.

If Francesco II's secretary is to be believed, the stunning virtuosity exhibited in Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* had a catalytic effect on its viewers. Relating the painting's ceremonial installation, he reported that within hours of its unveiling, this "noble work" made a transition from votive painting to venerated object. With each passing hour, "people brought back to health" lighted candles before it and deposited offerings of wax and "other images."⁷ Not the 1499 Lonigo panel or, to my knowledge, any other *tavoletta votiva* underwent a similar shift in status. Yet if these and other aspects of style and spectator response distance one painting from the other, focus and function bring them together. Like the *Madonna della Vittoria*, the Lonigo panel presents the donor in unmediated communion with the divine and, like Mantegna's great altarpiece, it fulfilled a vow that not only acknowledged the efficacy of the intercessor but also projected the worthiness and social respectability of the recipient of God's grace, namely the votary. Importantly, it did so publicly.⁸

In asserting a belief in the power of petitionary prayer and a conviction that the Madonna is willing to intercede with God on behalf of humanity, both master paintings like *Madonna della Vittoria* and modest pictures like the Lonigo *tavoletta* point to a pragmatic view of religion. In recognizing the agency of the individual – his or her capacity to enter into dialogue with God – it was a view that stood in contrast to religious rites such as the sung High Mass.⁹ Conducted in Latin, a language that was the preserve of the educated minority, and recited in a virtually inaudible whisper by clergy representing the orthodox opinion that the words of the consecration of the bread and wine were too sacred for ordinary folk, High Mass veiled the sacred in a shroud of protective mystery that distanced congregants from their God.¹⁰ The extrainstitutional practice of petitionary prayer was different. It enabled the *popoli* to traverse that distance. With illustrative clarity, *tavolette votive* depict the laity's ability to engage in direct and dynamic discourse with God through his saints whenever and wherever they confronted life's dire challenges.¹¹ Although sixteenth-century Catholic reformers explicitly cite *tavolette votive* as worrisome objects, these modest paintings are not singled out as more troubling than any other votive form. Still, in the church's struggle to redirect into orthodox channels the popular practices that were taking place around cultic images – in and through which the represented saint was held to have presence – it is hard to imagine that these humble little pictures of artisans, merchants, and farmers in active mediation with the supernatural for human benefit did not trigger greater anxiety than, say, a candle or pair of eyes cast in wax. After all, in representing merchants, artisans, farmers, and the like in dialogue with the saints, *tavolette*

claimed for the laity in graphically clear terms a capacity held by the church to be the preserve of authorized clergy. Not surprisingly, steps were taken to bring votive practices under control and votive images under scrutiny.

As demonstrated by decrees issued by provincial councils in Malines and Mexico in the wake of the Council of Trent's conclusion in 1564, uneasiness with cultic culture was not specific to Italy. Throughout the Catholic world, pilgrims journeyed to thaumaturgic shrines, offered prayers of thanks for a miraculous cure or rescue, and left on site an *ex-voto* as evidence of the efficacy of intercession. While votive panel paintings were among the objects offered both north and south of the Alpine divide, the number of extant examples in Northern Europe that predate circa 1600 is, in comparison to the quantity preserved throughout Italy, quite small. To be sure, the existing corpus of Italian fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *tavolette votive* is reduced from what it once was. Nonetheless, the total is great enough to suggest various ways images were perceived to function in the cultic culture of early modern Italy.

It would be difficult to determine definitively the precise function Francesco II Gonzaga envisioned for *Madonna della Vittoria* if elucidating documents did not relate the circumstances that prompted him to commission the artistic services of Mantegna. While the inclusion of Francesco identifies the painting as a votive, it does not indicate whether it was offered *per grazia ricevuta* or given *pro remedio animae*. The difference between the two is worth noting. A votive proffered *per grazia ricevuta* is something testamentary – it can be a material object or an act of veneration – that is given or performed *after* a miracle of intercession has occurred. A votive *pro remedio animae* is something given or performed with the objective of securing *future* salvation for the donor's soul or that of a relative or friend. A votive *per grazia ricevuta* was understood as an obligation, the requisite fulfillment of a promise. A votive *pro remedio animae* was viewed as an effective way to accumulate spiritual credit.¹²

Strictly speaking, only a votive donated *per grazia ricevuta* can be called an *ex-voto*. The difference between a votive *per grazia ricevuta* and one *pro remedio animae* has greater relevance for a consideration of the functional value of masterworks, such as Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* and, to cite another example, Giovanni Bellini's *Enthroned Madonna and Child with Saints and Doge Agostino Barbarigo*, 1488 (Figure 3), than it does for evaluating *tavolette* like the 1499 Lonigo panel. This reflects the difficulty of placing religious paintings of the period into discrete categories. An altarpiece could, as *Madonna della Vittoria* did, function doubly as an *ex-voto* and as the visual centerpiece of liturgical rites.¹³ Bellini's *Enthroned Madonna with Doge Agostino Barbarigo*, which began its functional life as a votive *pro remedio animae* and went on to become an altarpiece, points less to a double function than to one that changed over time and with placement. Unlike Mantegna's great vertically oriented canvas, which was from the start destined to grace an altar in a public space, Bellini's horizontally



3. Giovanni Bellini, *Enthroned Madonna and Child with Saints and Doge Agostino Barbarigo*, 1488. Oil on canvas. Murano, S. Pietro Martire. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York)

formatted painting began its life as a private devotional work. Until Barbarigo's death in 1501, it hung in the "crossing" (*crozola*) of the doge's palace. By bequest, it was displayed thereafter on the high altar (*sopra l'altar grande*) of the Convent of Sta. Maria degli Angeli in Murano with the stipulation that the sisters pray before it for the eternal good of Agostino's soul.¹⁴

As a group, *tavolette votive* were not subject to similar functional shifts any more than they could change from votive object to venerated sacred image, as Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* had done. Admittedly, paintings like the Lonigo panel of 1499, which lacks a clarifying inscription and is void of visualized clues indicating the circumstances behind its donation, might have been given for the future redemption of the donor's soul (*pro remedio animae*). This, however, seems unlikely. Most of these small pictures proclaim divine intercession a fait accompli. They do so quite clearly, either by visualizing a scene that suggests a chronological sequence of events or with an inscription that states what happened. Regardless of how the story behind the panel's donation is communicated, these humbly rendered paintings look back in time. They reference something that already took place. They are remembrances of trauma, testaments of survival. Indeed, more than half of the corpus of extant early modern *tavolette* illustrates a life-threatening experience, often at a climactic moment: a house crumbles from earthquake tremors, a pregnant woman is depicted midfall as she tumbles from a horse, a child is pinned beneath the wheel of an oxcart or plummets into a well, a man is attacked by wolves or

is covered in the buboes of plague, families flee flames engulfing their home, travelers are imperiled as their ship founders in stormy seas, soldiers as well as noncombatants are stabbed and battered, the ill pray desperately from the confines of a sickbed, and the possessed collapse from exhaustion as tormenting demons are expelled from their bodies.

Even *tavolette* that reflect the basic compositional strategy of grand votive pictures in the form of a *sacra conversazione* typically signal their function as offerings *per grazia ricevuta* through the votary's choice of attendant saints (see [Plate 4](#) and [Figure 32](#)). A votary in prayerful dialogue with the Madonna and St. Leonard, for example, suggests divine intervention took place during childbirth, while a supplicant in the presence of St. Sebastian or St. Roch suggests attendance safeguarded the donor during an outbreak of plague. Miracle books recording a similar assortment of miraculous cures and rescues, and which in some cases verbally parallel a scene of crisis pictured on a *tavoletta*, further identify these images as *ex-votos*. In fact, there is nothing to suggest strongly that these panels were given for anything other than the successful resolution of a problem. A *tavoletta* was an object *ex voto suscepto*. It is important to keep this in mind because in this book the terms “*ex-voto*” and “*votive panel picture*” are used interchangeably with specific reference to *tavolette votive*.

Votive pictures, which were displayed in communal spaces, should not be confused with devotional paintings hanging on domestic interior walls.¹⁵ It is easy enough to mistake one for the other, especially after Giovanni Battista Moroni (ca. 1525–78) combined portraiture with religious painting to create in the mid-sixteenth century a new type of devotional picture.¹⁶ Consider, for example, Moroni's *Gentleman in Adoration of the Madonna and Child*, circa 1560 ([Figure 4](#)) and a roughly contemporaneous *tavoletta votiva* at Lonigo ([Figure 5](#)). Similarities are readily apparent. Differences are no less conspicuous. Although both compositions are restricted to a depiction of a supplicant in meditative communion with the Madonna and Christ Child, scale and style distinguish Moroni's canvas from the panel painted in tempera. Measuring 60 by 65 centimeters, Moroni's oil painting is more than four times the size of the *tavoletta*, which has dimensions slightly less than 28 by 31 centimeters. In other examples of this pictorial type by Moroni, such as *The Baptism of Christ with a Portrait of a Gentleman* (Private Collection, Milan) and *Portrait of a Man and Woman with the Virgin and Child and St. Michael* (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond), devotees, all of whom are similarly presented in extended bust-length, are shown frontally and in profile. The devotee in *Gentleman in Adoration of the Madonna and Child*, however, is positioned to direct the viewer's contemplative gaze diagonally back and into the ambiguously defined space. Significantly, neither Mary nor the Infant Jesus returns the gentleman's gaze. Their attention is instead focused on the spectator beyond the frame. It is directed to the person praying before the image. This is not the case with the Lonigo panel.



4. Giovanni Battista Moroni, *A Gentleman in Adoration of the Madonna and Child*, circa 1560. Oil on canvas. Samuel H. Kress Collection. Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art. (Photo: National Gallery of Art)

While the painter of this *tavoletta* rendered the donor more finely than most painters of *tavolette*, he did not attempt Moroni's calculated angling of the gentleman. As for the depicted Madonna dei Miracoli and Christ Child, both look down upon and gesture toward the supplicant. In contrast to Moroni's canvas, here the communicative act of looking is kept within the pictorial frame.

Beyond the details of this comparison, it should be noted that in contrast to *tavolette*, almost all of which have either no frame or only a very simple one, devotional paintings frequently were placed in relatively costly or visually assertive surrounds.¹⁷ In part, this served to establish a visual focus reflective of the work's function. While the attention of the figures represented within a *tavoletta*'s border remains focused within the composition, the *tavoletta*, as an ex-voto, defied these boundaries by referencing the cultic image beyond the picture's perimeter. Set before and around a sacred image through which,



5. Anonymous, votary in prayer, *tavoletta votiva*, mid- to late sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: with kind permission of Santa Maria dei Miracoli)

said Gabriele Paleotti (1522–97), divine goodness was made manifest by a *trasfigurazione* and the effecting of miraculous recoveries, the individual scenes of miraculous cures depicted on *tavolette* coalesced to create a visual surround – a frame, if you will – that avowed the efficacy of sacred presence and, thus, substantiated the truth of the archbishop’s statement.¹⁸ By contrast, and despite the outward gaze of some of the individuals portrayed in works like Moroni’s *Gentleman in Adoration of the Madonna and Child* and *Portrait of a Man and Woman with the Virgin and Child* and *St. Michael*, devotional paintings maintained an inward focus owing to the decisive boundaries established by the frame’s physical presence. Indeed, within the domestic setting, the frame worked to set apart the representation of the heavenly from the surrounding world of mundane things: chairs, tables, and other domestic furnishings and objects. Finally, votive and devotional paintings featuring the Virgin Mary tend to present her

differently. Devotional paintings offer the viewer a generalized portrait of the Holy Mother. While exceptions exist, including the sixteenth-century Lonigo panel, votive panels typically represent the Madonna with a signifying gesture, mark, or attribute that enabled viewers to readily identify her in association with a particular location: the face cradling gesture of Lonigo's Madonna dei Miracoli, for example, or the disfigured left cheek of the Madonna dell'Arco of Naples, and the Holy House of Nazareth with the Madonna of Loreto.¹⁹

Reflective rather than propitious, votive panel paintings *per grazia ricevuta* acknowledge that promises were kept by both participants in the devotional dialogue that is the iconographical hallmark of *tavolette*. The solicited saint interceded to remedy a bad situation as implicitly promised. In turn, and with an ex-voto evincing the fact, the supplicant fulfilled her or his prayerful declaration to honor the intercessor. In performing the dual votive functions of attesting efficacy and fulfilling a vow, *tavolette votive* can be seen to communicate their *raison d'être*, moving implicitly from imaged entreaty to material evidence that is further elucidated through contexts of donation and display. In this sense, *tavolette votive* offered *per grazia ricevuta*, no less than votive paintings given *pro remedio animae*, validate the devotional process illustrated with diagrammatic clarity in *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin*, circa 1395–1400 (Plate 1).²⁰

Painted at the end of the fourteenth century by Lorenzo Monaco (act. 1390–1423), *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* is documented above an altar set against the interior façade between the main portal and the smaller north portal of Florence's Cathedral by 1409. For decades thereafter, all those exiting the Duomo would have seen the great canvas, which sets forth the dynamics of double intercession. Among the most popular intercessory themes, the concept of double intercession, which acquired some significance in Western art, has its origins in a book written in praise of the Virgin Mary by Ernardus of Chartres (d. 1156) that came to be attributed to the author's better-known contemporary, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153). In fact, Bernard also spoke to the issue, describing in his commentary on the first line of the Song of Songs the indirect route by which a petitioner's appeal reaches heaven. Just as angels carried the prayers of the Bride (Virgin Mary) to the Bridegroom (Christ), so must our own supplications for "sublime favor" be tendered with "a becoming modesty" to God through the mediation of the Madonna.²¹ Nearly a century before its visualization by Lorenzo Monaco, the act of double intercession described by Ernardus was incorporated into chapter 39 of the illustrated *Speculum humanae salvationis* (Mirror of Human Salvation). The *Speculum* became, in turn, one of the most widely read religious texts of the time, informing sermons preached by San Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444), Bernardino of Busti (ca. 1450–ca. 1513), and others. Although *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* departs from the compositional precedent of early *Speculum* illustration by uniting Christ and Mary

in one picture, it expresses the concept as San Bernardino of Siena encapsulated it. “You have, O Man, a sure access to God. You have there the Mother before the Son before the Father. The Mother shows the Son her bosom and breasts. The Son shows the Father his wounds and side. Thus, no one can be turned away where there are so many symbols of love.”²²

Lorenzo Monaco at once clarified visually and verbally the complexity of double intercession structured centuries earlier by Ernardus of Chartres. His painting presents the dialogue in a way that is figuratively legible as well as literally readable. It begins with Mary pictured in the lower right of the canvas, moves laterally to Christ, who occupies the lower left, then ascends to God the Father positioned at the composition’s apex. Finally, through the descending dove of the Holy Spirit, the dialogue returns to where it began. Kneeling and with her left hand holding her breast and her right gesturing to the faithful assembled before her, the Madonna directs her gaze and words to Christ. “Dearest Son, because of the milk that I gave you, have mercy on them.” Looking heavenward, Jesus, in turn, utters his appeal. “My Father, let those be saved for whom you wished me to suffer the Passion.” God’s response is conveyed through gesture and by glance. His left hand is raised in benediction. With his right, he sends forth the Holy Spirit, which Christ directs back to his mother and those huddled before her, their size reduced in accordance with pictorial convention. Here, Mary is unequivocally defined as the saint of saints (*sancta sanctorum*). By right of filial affection, she is the bridge that provides those who dwell on earth access to those residing in heaven. The Franciscan observant Bernardino of Busti explained Mary’s unique position and the benefits that result from it. “She is the mediator of our intercession [*mediatrix nostre intercessionis*] ... [she] has no one above her except the three persons of the Trinity. But below her she has the three ranks of those being saved.... [P]laced in the middle, [Mary] joins and unites those three ranks to the Blessed Trinity.”²³ Extant early modern *tavolette votive*, more than 90 percent of which were dedicated to the Virgin, are testaments to Mary’s connective place and role.

Today, Andrea Mantegna’s *Madonna della Vittoria* enjoys wide recognition among students and scholars of the history of Italian Renaissance art. Despite their number, *tavolette votive*, like the 1499 panel from Lonigo, do not. Yet both masterfully rendered monumental votive paintings and small, humble offerings express a shared belief that Mary, *mediatrix nostre intercessionis*, not only assists the faithful seeking redemption in death but also helps the pious negotiate the trials and tribulations faced in life. As the recipient of most of the *tavolette votive* remaining from this period, Mary, it seems, was highly valued for her efficacy. She was not, however, alone in having license to intercede with God on behalf of humanity. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the roster of saints was large, and popular devotion to them was pervasive throughout

the Catholic world. In Italy, as elsewhere, chronicles, diaries, miracle books, inventories at thaumaturgic shrines, and myriad images that include Lorenzo Monaco's *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin*, Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria*, and hundreds of *tavolette votive* speak indisputably to widespread faith in the effectiveness of intercession and the productive capacity of the individual to address God.

Seemingly large, the number of extant *tavolette votive* that date to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is unquestionably much reduced from what it once was. Produced by and large for consumers of modest means by unnamed artisans with negligible artistic skills and, it appears, scant concern for the endurance of their work, *tavolette* fell victim to the fortunes of history and the ravages of time. Theft, war, and even liturgical reforms aimed at ridding sacred sites of popular objects, which some viewed as mundane things "without worth," caused panels to be lost and destroyed.²⁴ Shortcuts in production (a notable number were painted on raw wood) and unsystematic practices of display (dozens were nailed directly on top of others causing punctured panels to split and break apart) took a toll as well. Many *tavolette* are now in ruinous condition. While this history of indifference and even disdain suggests that votive panel paintings were from time to time viewed as having neither material value nor aesthetic merit, these modest images manifestly had value for their donors.

Value was not, however, determined by cost or virtuosic display. Instead, it inhered in the testamentary function of the object and, perhaps surprisingly, the humility reflected in the materials of which it was made and the unassuming style with which it was painted. In the first case, *tavolette* as objects were appreciated for their role in satisfying the terms of the contractual relationship that is at the heart of each intercessory act and at the center of all votive practices. Having requested and received intercession, a votary was obliged to acknowledge the grace obtained (*per grazia ricevuta*) from his or her holy benefactor. Pilgrimage, prayer, and the offering of a material token of gratitude filled this function. Yet, of the three, only the last had the potential to endure. In contrast to the transitory nature of a pilgrimage and prayer and unlike the ephemeral existence of a candle, an embossed metal plaque, terracotta figurine, or votive picture remained visible within the shrine long after the votary's departure. Placed on public view, it stood as a testament to an intercessor's efficacy and in evidence of a devotee's integrity for having honored a promise. In the second instance, the representation on the simple wooden panel expressed the Christian virtue of humility. Other popular *voti* similarly spoke to this value, but unlike terracotta figurines, wax casts, locks of hair, and the like, *tavolette* added an explanatory dimension to the donated object. They, alone, visualized the capacity of lowly human beings to commune with a heavenly hierarchy by representing the supplicant in communion with the solicited saint.

Tavolette always depict dialogues of devotion. Regardless of whether the votary is portrayed in prayer or captured at a moment of imminent danger, and no matter whether the intercessor is pictured seated on earth or observing from the heights of heaven, pious petitioner and attendant intercessor are always visually present. In each and every one of these pictured dialogues, the voice of the *miracolato* is audible. The humble style that is characteristic of *tavolette votive* is wholly appropriate to the unassuming materiality of the object itself. Yet style, like the modest object, says something about the donor. In the eyes of reformers, a humble, unpretentious style reflected a purity of religion that was associated with an earlier age. The absence of artifice and expensive materials, which the Dominican theologian Giovanni Andrea Gilio condemned in 1564 as evidence of the capricious errors of modern painters, was seen as the presence of an untainted and unadulterated piety.²⁵ Like *imagini oneste e devote*, which included cultic images purportedly painted by St. Luke, *tavolette votive* exhibited a lowly style that was eloquent and spiritually effective in its unskilled and unaffected simplicity.²⁶ Such humble offerings reflected well on those who gave them.

The significance of these images of communion is appreciated best when considered in and against the contexts of votive donation and display. With respect to donation, the case of Girolamo Cataneo recorded in the miracle book of the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Fonte of Caravaggio not far from Milan can serve as a representative example of a familiar scenario of causally related events. Suffering from kidney stones and seeking Mary's intercession, Cataneo "made a vow [*voto*] to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and in one day was freed" from his affliction. On July 15, 1590, Cataneo made a pilgrimage to the Madonna del Fonte's shrine to fulfill his promise.²⁷ After attending Mass, he departed, leaving behind a material testament to the efficacy of his holy benefactor. With this complex of acts – pilgrimage, recitation of prayers, and material donation – he discharged the *voto* he made to the Madonna del Fonte when he had solicited her aid. In the second instance, display, Cataneo's offering assumed additional significance. Added to the existing assemblage of ex-votos within the sanctuary, it was yet another evidentiary object acknowledging the efficacy of the Madonna del Fonte and the sanctity of the site made sacred by Mary's purported visitation to Gianetta de'Vacchi on May 26, 1432. In light of the importance of miracles as an identifying mark of the True Church, which throughout the Renaissance was demonstrated by the ongoing popularity of the *Golden Legend* as well as the publication of hagiographical corpuses like Luigi Lippomano's eight-volume *Sanctorum priscorum partum vitae* (1551–60), the testamentary function of *tavolette* is not inconsequential.²⁸ It is constructive, therefore, to try and visualize the sight confronting sixteenth-century visitors to the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Fonte and similar pilgrimage destinations.

Immagini sacre, or *immagini miracolose*, which according to Paelotti's *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (1582) included images through which (*col mezzo loro*) God "healed the infirm" and effected liberations "from diverse dangers," were on a day-to-day basis veiled by curtains or safeguarded by shutters.²⁹ Revealed principally on feast days, and only then in accordance with liturgical protocols, miracle-working images were shielded from view more often than not. Being out of physical sight, however, did not mean being out of the mind's eye. There is no shortage of testimonials pointing to painted images imprinted on a pious mind functioning as informative visual sources for visions.³⁰ To be sure, blessed visitations reflecting sacred images occurred to the saintly: Gregory VII in the eleventh century, Catherine of Siena in the fourteenth, Caterina Vigri in the fifteenth, and so on. There is, however, no reason to assume that the *popoli* were less affected by the potency of pictorial experience. In fact, miracle books recounting apparitional visitations by the Madonna to the poor and dispossessed suggest familiarity with paintings located in nearby churches. The apparition of the Madonna Mario Homodei described seeing on the outskirts of Tirano in the Alto Adige on September 29, 1504, had a striking resemblance to representations of the Madonna of Gallivaggio, whose celebrated visitation on October 10, 1492, caused a shrine to be built in her honor nearly one hundred kilometers northeast of Tirano. Additionally, it can be argued that veiled or not, *immagini miracolose*, like holy relics encased in concealing reliquaries, were a commanding focus of thaumaturgic spaces by reason of everything that surrounded them. Not only did the flicker of dozens if not hundreds of votive candles, an array of ex-votos, and the routine performance of pietistic acts by votaries point to the unseen enshrined image, but *tavolette votive* re-presented that image in a clearly recognizable way because they always represented the intercessor. Without exception, early modern votive panel paintings include a likeness, a portrait if you will, of a cultic shrine's titular saint.

It was within sacred spaces and against votive display that a pilgrim understood the import of observations like the one made by the humanist Flavio Biondo (1392–1463) when he entered the Sanctuary of the Madonna of Loreto in the mid-fifteenth century. The confronted sight, he said, proffered "striking evidence that God listens to the prayers of suppliants."³¹ By the mid-sixteenth century, visitors to Loreto and elsewhere looked upon an assortment of anatomical casts made of wax and metal (*immagini*) hanging from rafters and suspended from tie beams spanning chapels. They surveyed small gold and silver portrait plaques (*tavole*) lining pilasters and columns, took note of discarded crutches and bits of clothing littering the floor, and gazed upon gem-encrusted diadems and bracelets resting on statue pedestals. They also looked at *tavolette*. Together, these things presented pilgrims with a veritable testamentary collage

of disasters avoided through the receipt of intercessory grace. But among this collective mass of votive objects, *tavolette* were singular.

As pictures illustrating everything from women in the throes of childbirth to the accused being subjected to the tortures of judicial interrogation by rope hoist, these depictions of the quotidian reveal much about life centuries ago. Arguably, the insights they afford concerning the use of images at a time when the very nature of that usage was being challenged by Protestants and scrutinized for error by Catholic authorities is even more enlightening. The increasing popular appeal of *tavolette votive* coincided with intensified efforts by the Roman Church to assume control over access to the supernatural. This included establishing the proper means of honoring cultic images as well as imposing order on votive display. Offerings fashioned of rich materials and exhibiting a high level of artistic skill were perceived to reflect the donor's illustrious status. Consequently and increasingly, they were awarded pride of place, while at many shrines meager and mundane things were shoved aside and even periodically discarded as superfluous signs of the obvious – a site's sacredness. Still, this did not slow the flow of pilgrims or slacken the offering of ex-votos. Votive images and objects continued to accrue at cultic shrines, attesting individually and collectively sacred presence.³²

This book considers aspects of popular piety in early modern Italy through an examination of votive panel paintings. The objective is twofold. It seeks to bring into focus a corpus of works that by and large has been overlooked and attempts to reconstruct the ways *tavolette votive* were understood to function by those who used them as well as by those who tried to regulate their usage. Accordingly, they are discussed as testamentary objects, as narrative pictures, and, paradoxically, as signs of faith and indications of superstition. The reproduced *tavolette* have been selected as illustrating a point best. I have judged panels representing exorcism, for example, as revealing more about the church's concern with an improper use of images by the *popoli* than, say, scenes of bedside prayer. Hence, *tavolette* representing exorcism figure in [Chapter V](#), "Signs of Faith, Signs of Superstition." Although choices often reflect the existence of similarly themed images that allow for comparisons to be made, often across regions, I have endeavored to provide the reader with an overview of the diversity of subject matter (parturition, exorcism, judicial interrogation), styles, and narrative modes.

[Chapter II](#), "*Tavolette votive*: Form, Function, Context," attempts to familiarize the reader with a votive form that has received scant critical attention. Distinguishing *tavolette* among popular votive objects requires the form's functional similarity to other ex-votos be firmly established. To this end, this chapter presents a broad picture of votive practices that situate *tavolette* within the sequenced complex of actions common to all ex-votos offered *per grazia ricevuta*. Additionally, it reviews the frequently conflicted interfacing of popular

expressions of faith, the interests of church authorities, and market forces. It describes what *tavolette* look like, the variety of materials with which they were made, and the marketplace in which they were acquired. It also examines the circumstances that over time reduced their number. Following at least a millennium of near total absence, simple votive panel paintings reappeared in Italy in the mid- to late fifteenth century. In discussing the chronological parameters of this study, which have been set between circa 1470 and circa 1610, a possible explanation for their reemergence is proposed. More germane to the chapters that follow, the review of the history of votive pictures, as well as the discussion of the reasons for the book's bracketing dates, allows these images to be placed in the context of sixteenth-century debates concerning image use, which raised the specter of superstitious practices and revealed perceptions of idolatrous behavior. Scholarly literature on idolatry and iconoclasm in the Renaissance is large and excellent. Here, it is reviewed with a tight focus on ex-votos and with a dependence on contemporaneous voices commenting specifically on votive donation.

Chapter III, "Determining Functional Value: Attestations of Fact and Faith," argues against the current practice of labeling ex-votos, including *tavolette votive*, "gifts." Reflecting on the visual and sometimes accompanying verbal narratives supplied by dedicatory inscriptions, it proposes that *tavolette* be appreciated as documents with testamentary weight. Here, a "document" is understood as being of two distinct kinds. The first is as a record of verifiable fact. The second, more elusively, is as an attestation of faith. The former acknowledges something happened that can be substantiated by witnesses: a child fell into a well, a fire burned a home to the ground, an outbreak of plague erupted. The latter offers an explanation for survival: through divine intercession the child was rescued, a family escaped the flames that consumed its home, the afflicted did not succumb to contagion. In arguing for placing *tavolette* under this rubric, and despite the fact that approximately 90 percent of panels extant from this period either were offered singly to the Madonna or were joint dedications that included her, the focus is placed on St. Nicholas of Tolentino (ca. 1246–1306). Two inseparable reasons informed this choice. First, the Tolentino shrine is the only site honoring a canonized saint that has a significantly large collection of early modern *tavolette votive*. Of the nearly four hundred panels preserved in the *abbazia* of San Nicola, nearly one-third predate circa 1600. Their existence points to the second reason for this chapter's focus. In contrast to the sanctity of the Virgin Mary, Nicholas of Tolentino's reputation for holiness, or *fama sanctitatis*, had to be adjudicated according to guidelines of official procedure dictated by papal authority.

In 1325, testimony from 365 deponents who claimed Nicholas of Tolentino rescued them from drowning, cured them of an affliction, saved them from death by marauding armies, and the like were duly recorded. In recent years,

these depositions have become readily available. Their preservation, together with the conservation of numerous *tavolette* offered to Nicholas after his canonization in 1446, affords us the singular opportunity to consider two forms of popular attestation in conjunction with one another. The first, notarized depositions, is verbal. The second, panel paintings that similarly testify that a miracle occurred, is visual.

A comparison of these two forms of advocacy is enriched by the addition of a third. Coinciding roughly with the canonization proceedings of 1325, the walls of the Grand Chapel at the *abbazia* San Nicola da Tolentino were decorated with an extensive fresco cycle at the behest of Nicholas's monastic brothers. Among the scenes picturing the life of the would-be saint, including his education and his taking of holy orders, are those of enacted miracles. Nicholas is shown rescuing seafarers, resuscitating a young girl, exorcizing demons, curing the crippled, restoring sight to the blind, and liberating the unjustly condemned. Although the case of Nicholas of Tolentino is by reason of source material the focus of the discussion, it has implications for cultic culture throughout Italy. Significantly, a representation of Nicholas – and not just his relics – stood in the center of the Grand Chapel amid the assemblage of ex-votos. The statue cannot be divorced from the votive practices performed at the site. The ensemble of images that formed the backdrop to pietistic actions by Nicholas's devotees provides entrée to a consideration of the attestation of miracles purportedly enacted through images of the Madonna, a topic that is considered in greater depth in [Chapter IV](#).

[Chapter IV](#), “Narrative Modes,” begins with a consideration of the variety of ways the story behind a panel's donation is communicated. Despite their frequently formulaic appearance, *tavolette* are remarkably varied in narrative structure, ranging from monoscenic (single, privileged moment) to polyscenic (single-setting, double-time) configurations and including, albeit in rare examples, framed or strip sequences. Yet the narratives within the frame tell only a part of the story. Through the dynamics of display, votive pictures structure wholly new narratives or, to be more accurate, construct a *vita* of a shrine's titular saint. In essence, the collections of images of the miracles within a sanctuary are three-dimensional arrangements of the two-dimensional disposition of figures and vignettes on *vita* icons. On *vita* icons, the *figura* (a term designating both a literal and symbolic representation) of the saint forms the central focus around which are arrayed episodic scenes defining the holy status of the referent: the call to Christ, tests of faith, and demonstrations of sanctity through the performance of miracles. This presentation of holiness also characterized the relationship of images within thaumaturgic shrines. The representation of the thaumaturge was the hub to which the surrounding acts of intercession illustrated on *tavolette* pointed as if connected by spokes. Viewing the relationship of cultic images and *tavolette votive* in light of *vita* icons is

justified by the parallel compositional arrangements of broadsheets promoting pilgrimage sites. Replicating the format of *vita* icons, broadsheets feature the thaumaturge encircled by scenes of miraculous interventions (see Figures 19 and 60), many of which reproduce the imagery described in miracle books as having been on *tavolette*. Purchased as souvenirs by pilgrims, these sheets carried narratives that had flowed into a shrine on *tavolette* in the hands of grateful votaries back out across the countryside. Considered in this expanded sense, that is, as a visual recapitulation of a private, individual experience embedded in the public, collective story of an intercessor and his or her shrine, each *tavolette* is a metadiegetic narrative.

Focusing on exorcism, its depiction on *tavolette* and prescriptions for its performance in manuals sanctioned by the church, the fifth chapter, “Signs of Faith, Signs of Superstition,” proposes an alternative way of approaching the much discussed issues of the relationship of image to referent and agentic presence. In contrast to most other miraculous cures attested by *tavolette votive*, the purging of demons frequently was performed in the physical presence of a miracle-working image. In and of itself, this circumstance distinguished this particular miracle as especially susceptible to questions concerning rituals of ecclesiastical medicine (*medicines ecclesiastiche*) and popular perceptions concerning an affecting presence within an object. Combined with orthodox remedies for liberating the possessed from the clutches of the devil, among them Girolamo Menghi’s *Flagellum daemonum* of 1577, these questions demonstrate just how fine the line between orthodoxy and superstition was. Like other writers of exorcism manuals approved by the church, Menghi recommended the physical and verbal abuse of images of the devil as an operative way of impacting evil spirits. By juxtaposing sanctioned uses of images like those proposed by Menghi against those that were viewed less positively, such as ingesting dust gathered from a sacred image as a palliative against possession, and looking at both in light of the many depictions of exorcisms on *tavolette*, this chapter examines efforts to implement the Council of Trent’s directive to root out superstition from devotional practices of invocation and image use. In light of Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti’s inclusion among *immagini sacre* those images “through” which God enacts miracles, this was an issue of critical importance to the church.

In recent years, the literature on so-called miraculous images has grown. In general, the scholarship on ex-votos has kept pace. Yet only limited attention has been focused specifically on *tavolette votive*. The volumes examining these panels are, for the most part, catalogue raisonnés of *tavolette* preserved at a particular shrine. In addition to reviewing a site’s history, they provide a panel’s dimensions, medium, brief description of the image, and, on occasion, a highly useful stylistic grouping of works suggesting individual hands within a local workshop.³³ This study is a departure from and, it is hoped, an addition to these

informative texts. Viewing early modern *tavolette votive* as a rich and largely untapped resource that can reveal much about popular image-use and cultic culture when looked at comprehensively, the focus has been expanded beyond the collection of a single site. Indeed, it has been expanded beyond the picture on the panel to the rituals attending donation, beyond a *tavoletta*'s primary function of vow fulfillment, to the structured meanings communicated to shrine visitors who saw it displayed in the company of other ex-votos and in meaningful proximity to a venerated image within a sacred setting. The private interactions of pious petitioners and responsive intercessors, or what can be thought of as dialogues of devotion, are thus brought into the world of public exhibition and spectator response. Bringing a variety of texts to bear on the subject, this study examines how *tavolette* functioned as documents of fact and as testaments of faith. It considers how these panels in concert with purportedly miracle-working images were structured to read as narratives within and beyond their pictorial frames. Finally, it discusses how they were viewed alternately as signs of true belief and as evidence of misplaced faith. The afterword incorporated into the conclusion suggests the continued relevancy of these issues.

Admittedly, the task of historical recovery is fraught with obstacles.³⁴ It is impossible to deny that efforts to reconstruct the visual experience of another, especially an experience informed by the historical circumstances of a distant age, are “vexed.”³⁵ But a challenging task need not be an insuperable one.³⁶ We can come to recognize what people living long ago believed if, on the one hand, we admit that historical distancing fosters insights that otherwise would be inaccessible, while, on the other hand, we employ Jauss’s model of reception, not to trace a history of potential aesthetic significances – after all, from the very start these were things negatively affected by taxonomic judgments leveled on the “popular” – but to silhouette individual response against collective, subconscious expectations.³⁷ By these means, with an array of textual sources in hand, and having seen hundreds of votive pictures, I attempt in this study to inscribe *tavolette votive* within a “holistic” history of images and their use.³⁸

Finally, the reader needs to be aware of some challenges presented by source materials. Throughout my text are quotations from panel inscriptions and *libri dei miracoli*, which in many respects are the verbal counterparts to popular votive pictures. The miracle books I have used come from diverse shrines in various regions of Italy: Tuscany, the Marche, Umbria, Alto Adige, Campania. While they share features typical of the genre, their terminology is not identical. Different terms designate the same article or concept, and variant spellings of the same word appear even within the same text. A rope hoist, for example, appears as *corda*, *strappo*, and *fune*, a person who is demonically possessed is characterized as *indiavolato*, *indemoniato*, or *inspiritato*, while a vow is a *voto* or *boto*. Bracketed passages and italicized words and phrases in the original language necessarily reflect the word choices and spellings of the source.

II

TAVOLETTE VOTIVE: FORM, FUNCTION, CONTEXT

Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis.
(God is wonderful in His saints.)

Psalm 67:36

In the evening ... at San Michele Berteldi, it began to be said that an image of Our Lady ... had miraculously closed its eyes.... Before a day had passed, numbers of candles were lighted, and great veneration was paid to it, so that a wall was built in front of it like a church ... [and] many waxen images were brought to it and many votive offerings.

Luca Landucci, diary entry for November 13, 1506¹

Oh Queen of Angels, Lady of the World, advocate of the People ... come to the aid of your pious servant, help your vassal, sustain his body with your pious hands ... and I will visit your saintly temple, & leave there a testimony of the grace I received [*testimonio della ricevuta grazia*].

Luca Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata di Firenze*, 1593²

Today, as in past centuries, travelers from afar as well as residents of Rome visit the Church of Sant'Agostino, an austere structure situated in the heart of the ancient Campus Martius that was a frequent stop along the pilgrimage route leading from the Porta del Popolo on the city's northern edge to St. Peter's Basilica west of the Tiber River. Many come to marvel at Caravaggio's arrestingly beautiful altarpiece in the Cavalletti Chapel, *The Madonna of Loreto* (1605–6).³ Others come to consider Raphael's fresco of *Isaiah* (1512), a dynamic and heroic figure painted in response to the weighted and expansive prophets and sibyls populating Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. Jacopo Sansovino's masterful *Tabernacle of the Madonna del Parto*, commissioned by the



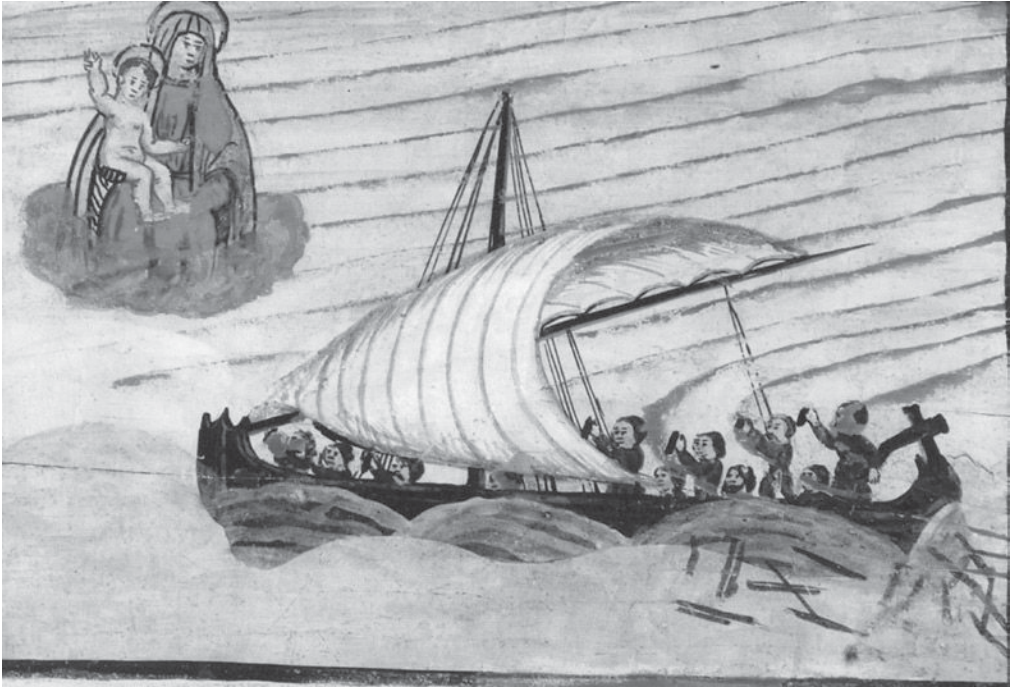
6. Jacopo Sansovino, *Madonna del Parto*, 1516–21, in situ with ex-votos. Rome, Sant'Agostino. (Photo: author)

heirs of Giovanni Francesco Martelli in 1516 and set in place by 1521, also garners attention (Figure 6).⁴ Yet unlike Caravaggio's *Madonna of Loreto*, a vision of effulgent grace, and in contrast to Raphael's inspired *Isaiah*, Sansovino's marble statue draws visitors for reasons other than the artistic merits it evinces. Behind, beside, and before Sansovino's carving of the Madonna and Christ Child are hundreds of ex-votos – small images and objects that record a pious petitioner's appeal to God for an alleviation of suffering or protection from danger, public testaments verifying the donor's belief in God's positive response to that plea, signs that a devotional dialogue took place. Simply stated, these things gratefully avow miracles, and they do so in a very public manner.⁵

Existing by reason of a vow made and offered within the framework of popular pietistic practices, each ex-voto left beside Sansovino's sculpture signifies

the privileged place the Madonna holds in the hearts of expectant and concerned parents. Bouquets fashioned of pink and blue ribbon compete for space amid scribbled notes and scripted letters that speak of difficult pregnancies and complicated deliveries. Albums displayed on stands and balanced atop a variety of surfaces overflow with photographs of cradled infants and smiling toddlers and, tacked to the wall, hand-colored nineteenth-century engravings illustrate a youth's life-threatening fall from a ladder and a young woman, her health restored, leaping from her sickbed. Individually, each of these things – bow, letter, photograph, and print – attests an intimate, contractual conversation between the Madonna and one of her devotees: a request by the latter, a response by the former, and, in accordance with the prescribed obligations of a sacred promise made at the moment of invocation, a material riposte acknowledging the efficacy of the Madonna del Parto. Together, they are an index of Mary's spiritual presence on earth and visual evidence of faith in holy intercession. The nineteenth-century prints and the twenty-first-century photographs framing Sansovino's *Madonna del Parto* are also among the pictorial descendants of the more than fifteen hundred late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *tavolette votive*, the small, votive panel pictures that are the subject of this book.

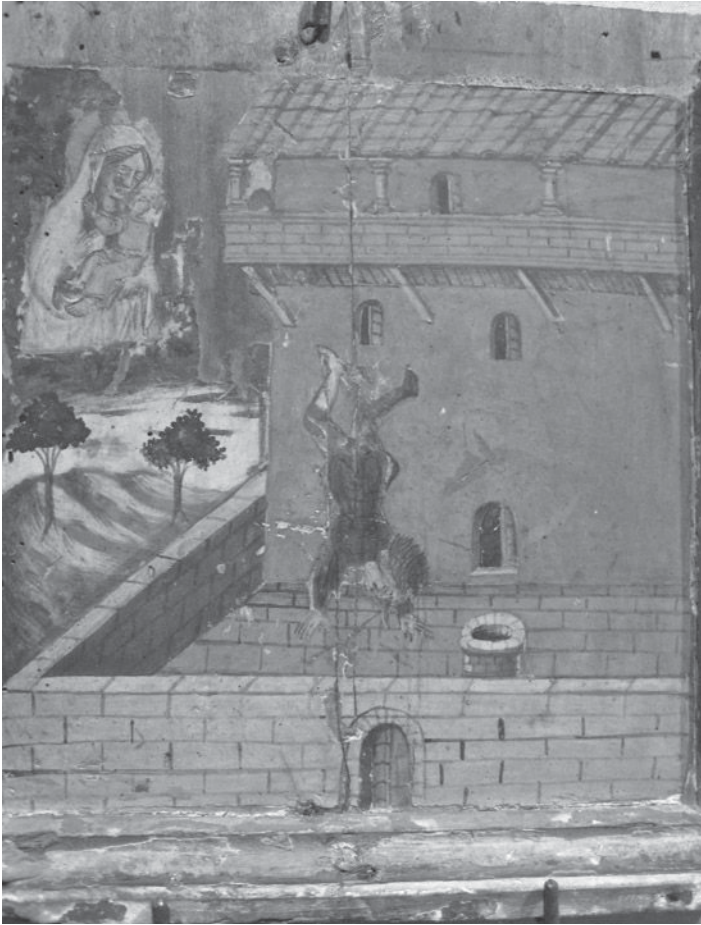
Various referred to in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts and documents as *tavolette votive*, *quadri del voto*, *tabulae votarum*, *tavolectae dipincta*, or simply *tavolette* or *tabellae* (*tolèle*, *tolletta*, *tovoletta*, *tavoluzzo* – the spelling varies from region to region and even within the same text), votive panel pictures that evince God's willingness to intervene in human affairs when called upon are remarkably consistent in composition despite variables in date and production location. As a corpus, *tavolette* can be divided into two basic groups. Within the largest collections of early modern panels, each is represented equally. The majority represents a telling or dramatic moment within an unfolding series of moments. Picturing brigands setting upon lone travelers, seafarers caught in a storm (Figures 7, 47), men falling from buildings and treetops (Figure 8), women enduring the dangers of childbirth (see Figures 41, 42, and 46), the accused suffering the miseries of prosecutorial torture by rope hoist (see Figures 51–56 and Plate 8), the possessed being exorcised of demons (see Figures 15, 61, and 66 and Plate 7), and the endangered escaping the devastations of war, plague, and earthquake (Figure 9), *tavolette* present contemporary viewers with a startling array of the perils and suffering that were endemic to life some five hundred years ago. In addition to these narrational images, hundreds of other *tavolette* simply picture the votary in prayer. While these eschew the specificity of scenes of exorcism, childbirth, and a variety of clearly defined accidents, depictions of votaries soliciting help from their sickbeds suggest the reason for their donation. Although lacking the drama of the nineteenth-century print tacked to the wall behind Sansovino's *Madonna del Parto*, they nonetheless indicate a recovery from some undisclosed illness. The Lonigo panel of 1499



7. Anonymous, rescue at sea, *tavoletta votiva*, 1566. Tempera on panel. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: with kind permission of Santa Maria dei Miracoli)

(Figure 2), which offers no visual or verbal explanation for the offering of the panel, can stand as an example of a subset of images within this second group. Despite their ambiguity, these *tavolette* are as eloquent on the issue of faith as are those representing the bedridden and the threatened. Irrespective of the intelligibility of the painted scene and regardless of whether it is augmented by an elucidating dedicatory inscription, all *tavolette votive* speak to a belief in the active presence of the supernatural in the natural world. Visualizing a dialogue of devotion between a supplicant and his or her chosen saint, these small pictures attest, as do all ex-votos, “a fervent desire on the part of votaries for manifest sacred immanence in the earthly realm.”⁶

In affirming popular faith in sacred presence, *tavolette* are no different from other votive objects and actions. Regardless of their material or performative form, *voti* intertwined the votary with a selected object of donation, a prescribed rite, or both, bringing individuals living in this world into contact with holy personages dwelling in another. Without question, a supplicant’s undertaking of a pilgrimage, recitation of the rosary, attendance at Mass, offering of a wax cast of an injured part of the body, monetary donation, or presentation of a candle with its real and metaphorical capacity to illuminate was understood to acknowledge a relationship between a pious petitioner on earth and an intercessor in heaven, but the differences between votive forms



8. Anonymous, fall from a roof, *tavoletta votiva*, sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Viterbo, Il Museo degli Ex-voto, Sanctuary of the Madonna della Quercia. (Photo: author)

were meaningful. In fact, the materiality and value of a votive (the fabric of the object, its facture, or both) as well as its mode (verbal, visual, performative) must be appreciated as factors of consequence. Any decision made by a votary concerning the materiality and mode of her or his *voto* was a choice of import. Singularly and in concert with one another, these factors affected how a votive was seen to transmute the quotidian into the extraordinary and traverse the divide that distanced heaven from earth.

The implications of mode can be readily demonstrated. Consider, for example, mixed-media votive effigies, or *boti*, and counterweights or counterlengths, or *massae cera* (also referred to as *contrepoids*).⁷ Both *boti* and *massae cera* asserted resemblance between the material object and its donor or the individual (often a child) on whose behalf it was given. Additionally, both did so, at least in most instances, with the same principal material: wax. *Boti* were mixed-media constructions, yet the all-important heads of these effigies were portraits fashioned



9. Anonymous, *tavoletta votiva* offered by Viadana family for earthquake survival, sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Tolentino, Basilica of San Nicola. (Photo: author)

by skilled *ceraiuoli* (image makers who work in wax). Having modeled a physiognomic likeness of wax, the *ceraiuolo* painted it with a mixture of egg tempera and oil, a technique known as wet-on-wet. Wet-on-wet facilitated the subtle blending of colors that transformed the portrayal into a vivid, veristic portrait.⁸ The intended naturalism of votive effigies did not go unnoticed. In early modern texts they are described as naturalistic and lifelike (*immagini al natural, similitudini*, and *somiglianze*) or referred to as portraits from life (*ritratti dal vivo*). Like *botti*, *massae cera* also were formed of wax. Unlike effigies, though, the wax was not subjected to the studied modeling of a *ceraiuolo*. Resemblance was instead conveyed through measurable equivalences: a mass of unshaped wax conveyed similitude by either equaling the votary's weight or extending to his or her height. Without question, both *botti* and *massae cera* advanced a relationship of likeness between an object and a specific person. In considering comparatively these two votive forms, however, it is equally apparent that similarity does not mitigate difference. While *botti* and *massae cera* can be said to fulfill the same function (vow fulfillment) by referencing the same thing (the votary) through the use of a like substance (wax), their respective ways of doing so cannot help but elicit divergent viewer responses. An effigy, which is figural in form and expresses likeness through referential details of appearance (physiognomic,

physical, and sartorial), simply does not operate visually in the same way as a counterweight composed of a lump of wax. In distinction to these two options for self-referencing, *tavolette votive* offered votaries a third possibility. A painting could graphically depict the circumstances that prompted a supplicant's plea for help. In *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata di Firenze* (1593), a miracle book that augments sixty-three accounts of miraculous interventions with illustrative woodcuts suggestively referencing *tavolette votive*, Luca Ferrini put it this way. A *tavoletta* has the capacity to explicate (*esplicare*), describe (*descrivere*), and declare (*dichiarare*) a miracle.⁹

Beyond the possibilities afforded by material and mode – a lump of wax, a fashioned portrait, a depicted story – a votive object's meaning was enriched by its physical proximity to a cultic image. Any decision concerning the placement of an ex-voto was, therefore, no less critical than its form. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century texts provide vivid accounts of devotees clamoring to get close to an image associated with miraculous cures and rescues. Devotees are described as weeping, beating their breasts, wailing, and removing whatever they wore that was of value – rings, shawls, cloaks – and placing these things beside an image perceived to be, as one such painting in the Cathedral of Cremona was characterized, “particularly apt to heal all ills.”¹⁰ Corresponding actions took place around saints' tombs. Frescoes picturing the pious shoving one another in order that they might touch the tombs of St. Peter Martyr in the Church of St. Eustargio in Milan, which is among the represented scenes in the Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, 1366–68 (Figure 10), and the Blessed Luca Belludi, which was painted by Giusto de' Menabuoi in the Conti Chapel, Basilica of St. Anthony, Padua, in 1382, speak to the salvific presence of the divine perceived to be at such places. So, too, do the less crowded gatherings around the tombs pictured in the vignettes on *vita* icons, such as the *St. Margaret of Antioch Altarpiece*, circa 1400 (Figure 11 and Plate 2), and Paolo Veneziano's now dispersed *St. Lucy Polyptych*, circa 1350.¹¹ In actuality, such pietistic outpourings gradually had become fewer in occurrence during the medieval period. Once encouraged to touch the sacred, the laity was distanced from it as saints' tombs disappeared into crypts with restricted access. Encountering the holy increasingly was limited to brief moments of revelation staged during feast days.¹²

The veiling and shuttering of cultic images created a parallel situation of limited accessibility for representations of Christ, Mary, and the saints. This fabricated separation, however, did not blunt the intensity of devotionism that took place around them, a point made by Leonardo da Vinci. As proof of the power of the image, Leonardo describes the behavior of pilgrims at such events. When, with “great ecclesiastical solemnity” and the singing of hymns, “pictures representing divine beings” were unveiled, the assembled multitude “immediately throw themselves to the ground, worshipping and praying to the deity



10. Andrea di Bonaiuti, *Pilgrims at the Tomb of St. Peter Martyr*, 1365–67. Florence, Sta. Maria Novella, Spanish Chapel. (Photo: Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, New York)

... for the repairing of their lost health and for their eternal salvation.” They did so, Leonardo observed, as if the represented divinity was actually present (*che se tale idea fusse si presente in vita*).¹³ To be sure, such pious zeal can be explained by the anticipation aroused by the clergy’s ceremonious opening of shutters and orchestrated removal of *cortine*, or painted linen cloths. At these moments of dramatic revelation, which included feast days and those associated with important miracles, the pious were given an especially poignant opportunity to come face-to-face with a divine countenance. But these events, contrived for effect, were not the sole cause of viewer response. The enshrinement structures that encased venerated images and impeded a viewer’s direct encounter with the sacred on a daily basis also enhanced the aura of the covered miracle-working image. Frequently opulent – and eye-catching – these coverings drew attention to their own crafted material presence, yet assertively deferred to what could not be seen: the intangible *praesentia* of the sacred.¹⁴



11. School of Turino Vanni, *St. Margaret Altarpiece*, circa 1400. Tempera on panel. Vatican City, Pinacoteca, Vatican Museum (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York)

The enactment of votive rituals around representations of saints regardless of their visibility is demonstrated by the coupling of relic and image at the shrine of St. Nicholas of Tolentino (ca. 1246–1306), which today houses one of the largest collections of late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *tavolette votive* in Italy. The notarized proceedings of Nicholas's canonization hearings (*canonizationis processus*) does more than recount over 350 miracles purportedly performed by the Augustinian monk both during his lifetime and, far more numerous, after his death. Included among the 371 depositions recorded in 1325 are several brief descriptions of the sight confronted by pilgrims to the burial site of the would-be saint. According to Paulus Alegii of Norcia and other deponents, devotees entering the sanctuary's Grand Chapel placed ex-votos in front of and beside the *arca*, a term that refers most likely to Nicholas's sarcophagus. These deponents also note that above the *arca* was an "image of the said brother Nicholas" (*depicta ymago dicti fratris Nicolai*).¹⁵ A different yet related situation existed at Florence's SS. Annunziata. Although rarely unveiled, the fresco of Gabriel's visitation to Mary, which was counted an *acheiropoiëton* owing to its purported completion by an angel, attracted a steady flow of pilgrims. According to Luca Ferrini, they left *tavolette* "on [*sopra* or *supra*] the altar."¹⁶ The resultant appearance of sacred sites filled with votive offerings suggests Richard Trexler was correct in stating that the sum of the parts constituted the visual effect of the whole. "Ex votos became part of the total reaction to the sacred object. Like secondary relics, they partook of the sacrality of the holy objects themselves by their nearness to them."¹⁷ As material verifications of efficacy, they undoubtedly moved subsequent visitors to the site to perform similar acts. In this context, *tavolette* are particularly distinctive, parlaying a dialogue between a supplicant and a saint represented within the bounds of the pictorial frame to an active and meaningful exchange between objects and images across a space.

Although generally alike in scale and presentation – *tavolette* are approximately the size of a shoebox lid or roughly that of an altarpiece predella panel, with the interceding saint[s] positioned in one of the panel's upper corners and the supplicant represented as either confronting a danger or prayerfully soliciting assistance – votive pictures vary in medium. Some, albeit limited in number, are simple woodblock prints affixed to a wood backing (Figure 12). Others, equally few, are little more than ink and wash sketches on paper or parchment attached to a wood support. Tempera and oil paintings, some on linen but most on panel, compose the vast majority. Some panels received a thin, preparatory coat of gesso, a mixture of finely ground plaster and glue, before being painted. Many *tavolette* did not. By and large, prepared panels have fared better than those made without this preliminary step. Sadly yet predictably, the cost-cutting and time-saving measure of applying pigment directly to a raw surface has had over time a disastrous effect. More than a few *tavolette* exist



12. Anonymous, votary in prayer, *tavoletta votiva*, sixteenth century. Hand-colored woodcut. Viterbo, Il Museo degli Ex-voto, Sanctuary of the Madonna della Quercia. (Photo: author)

as little more than semilegible patches of paint on fragmented bits of poplar, oak, or other wood that was readily available near a shrine site. To be sure, the principal factor behind a votary's donation was piety, but as these differences in facture indicate, the producers of *tavolette* considered profit in meeting popular demand. In fact, and while admittedly uncommon, some *tavolette* point to a panel's reuse. In some instances one image was painted over another. In other cases, a panel was simply flipped over, its verso providing the artist with a clean surface on which to paint a new scene for a different customer.

That *tavolette* participated in a market that to some degree was economically stratified cannot be questioned. Comparative examples illustrate the point. At one end of the spectrum are the stock images preserved at the Sanctuary of the Madonna della Quercia in Viterbo (Figure 12). Rudely rendered with an economy of line, accented with no more than two or three colors, printed on coarse paper, and glued to a wood backing, votive pictures of this sort communicate little about their individual donors. Represented figures seated in bed are plain in dress, undistinguished in features, and standardized in pose and gesture.

Variation occurs only in the placement of limited accent colors. The bedcovering in one image is red but colored green in another. The potential for individuation resided in what was written on the picture within the demarcated space reserved for dedicatory inscriptions: *per grazia ricevuta*, P.G.R., a name, a date, an incident. Decisions concerning color or having to do with a panel's inscription presumably were made by pilgrims at the time of purchase.

At Viterbo, for example, such decisions often occurred after the pilgrim arrived at his or her destination. Within a hundred years after the *tegola* painted with the Madonna's image had been tied among the branches of an oak tree in an area used for trade fairs, permanent structures began to replace temporary market stalls. A document of 1539 suggests that shops selling ex-votos were located closest to the sanctuary.¹⁸ Food, leather goods, and metalworks required pilgrims to venture a bit farther. Similar situations existed elsewhere. In the sixteenth century, devotees of Lonigo's Madonna dei Miracoli could obtain ex-votos, including *tavolette*, from two *botteghe* near the sanctuary.¹⁹ One was immediately adjacent to the church. The other was located about a half kilometer away. There is no clear indication of whether members of the custodial communities managing thaumaturgic sites were involved directly in the production of *tavolette*, but Teofilo Folengo's (1491–1544) satiric comments in *Baldus* indicate that the purchase price of votives went into the clergy's coffers.²⁰ Satire aside, documents at Loreto record collusion between those who fabricated *immagini* and those invested with the task of safeguarding a sanctuary and all that was within it.²¹

Holding a place at the other end of the scale is what is probably the best-known *tavoletta votiva* of this period, a circa 1508 panel painting attributed to an artist in Raphael's circle and offered *per grazia ricevuta* by the celebrated orator and canon of the Basilica of St. John Lateran, Tommaso "Fedra" Inghirami (1470–1516).²² Its singularity in terms of style suggests it was not purchased at a *bottega* but commissioned from a painter of some note (Figure 13). Here, and in notable contrast to panels with similar scenes (Figure 14), copious detail conveys with precision what happened to whom and where. Dressed in the robes of his office, Inghirami is shown pinned beneath the wheels of a grain cart whose drivers struggle to regain control over a chaotic situation. Inghirami's plainly visible golden-spurred boots, the rearing of the richly harnessed mule, and the balking oxen indicate that the canon was thrown from his mount. The readily recognizable relief from the Arch of Titus pictured on the panel's left identifies unequivocally the place where the accident occurred, a *vigna* by the Roman forum. Two inscriptions and the three blessed figures represented in the penumbra in the painting's upper right corner explain the rest. "Thomas Phaedrus, snatched from such great danger" by the grace of God, offered "to Jesus Christ our Savior" and Saints Peter and Paul a *tavoletta* in tributary remembrance of an act of holy intercession.²³ Between the extremes of



13. School of Raphael (?), *tavoleta votiva* offered by Tommaso Inghirami, circa 1508. Tempera on panel. Rome, San Giovanni Decollato. (Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, New York)



14. Anonymous, Lorenzo, son of Bernardino Zavalune, struck by an oxcart, *tavoleta votiva*, sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Cesena, Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte. (Photo: author)

Inghirami's assiduously painted panel and the replicated, cursory images on the Viterbo sheets are hundreds of *tavolette votive* confirming a fiscally diverse and thriving popular market for votive images. The significance of pictures exhibiting varying degrees of artistic skill goes beyond demonstrating the diversity of the marketplace. Considered in the context of the cultic culture of donation, they have much to tell us about the ways in which the *popoli* – ranging from *i letterati* like Inghirami to the *idioti* who bought the Viterbo sheets – used images in religious practice. In the context of display, they disclose how meaning was constructed across space and time as one image visually interacted with others.

TOTALING THE EVIDENCE: PRODUCTION, PRESERVATION, AND DESTRUCTION

The number of *tavolette votive* predating circa 1600 that survived into the twenty-first century is notable. It is also approximate. Dating votive pictures, which by and large were produced in local workshops for the popular market, is difficult. Although many are inscribed with the date of their donation, most are not. The frequently formulaic and often perfunctory nature of their compositions offers little assistance in establishing a panel's date. Similarly, depicted modes of dress help only to a very limited degree, changes in fashion being far less striking than the societal differences they bespeak. Yet approximate as it may be, the number of extant fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *tavolette* evinces what was surely a pervasive pietistic practice. Indeed, various contemporaneous texts, including sanctuary inventories, chronicles, diaries, letters, miracle books, church decrees, inquisitorial records, and even satires like Folengo's *Baldus* convey clearly what is implied by the collections of *voti* of all kinds that have survived from this period. Votive donation was not only a widespread practice; it was one that was immune to social distinctions. Sacred sites were, to be sure, filled with votive objects esteemed for their monetary value and aesthetic worth, such as gold portrait plaques, chalices studded with gems, and marble statues. These same sites also overflowed with things perceived to be of little, if any, consequence: bits of fabric, discarded crutches, frayed lengths of rope and broken chains, locks of braided hair, and *tavolette*. Although of scant monetary worth, these humble and highly personal things possessed a value that was wholly appropriate to the pious act of their offering. A *pia actio*, which included votive donation, rightfully acknowledged that everyone, regardless of what he or she was able to purchase, was humble in the presence of God. Ostentatious display might indicate a donor's social status in the secular world, but it did not represent his or her standing before the court of heaven.

Origine della Madonna della Quercia del Viterbo of 1571, a miracle book written with the intent of promoting the efficacy of Viterbo's Madonna della

Quercia, attests to the pervasiveness of votive practices.²⁴ Like the fresco of the Annunciation in Florence's SS. Annunziata, Viterbo's small painting of the Madonna and Child, a collaboration of human and angelic hands, was sacred by reason of its miraculous making. Purportedly the painting was begun in 1417 by one Maestro Cesare Monetto and then completed by an angel before it was placed among the branches of an oak tree along a well-traveled road on the city's perimeter. Prefacing accounts of the many acts of intercession credited to the Madonna della Quercia, a local Dominican friar, one Athanasio Nelli, observed that "all sorts of ordinary and great individuals – popes, kings, emperors, cardinals, bishops, lords, soldiers, men, women, and even the most arrogant sinners – appeal not only to God, the source and giver of all benefits, but also to the saints, who are [our] intercessors with God." When those dwelling in heaven respond to those residing on earth by healing the sick and rescuing the threatened, the soliciting supplicant recognized the beneficence of his benefactor. "If you want to see a vivid example [*vivo esempio*] [of this] ... you need only enter any city or countryside or castle or church or street [in Tuscany] where there are representations [*imagini*] of saints, in particular those of the glorious Virgin Mary. There you see a panoply of gold, of silver, painted, sculpted and in many other forms [*trofei d'oro, d'argento, dipinti, scolpiti & in alter maniere assai*] demonstrating plainly that when the saints are called upon because of some needs they are ready to plead with God for whatever good."²⁵

What Nelli says was visible everywhere – in Florence, Lucca, Siena, Montepulciano, Orvieto, Pisa, Arezzo, and Rome – Elia Cavriolo reported seeing decades earlier in churches throughout the province of Brescia.

You would have seen silver and gold necklaces, earrings, bracelets; you would have seen shirts, tunics, dresses, and belts of the greatest cost hanging from the wall, the altar and the soffit around the said image [of Christ]. Because, it is said, that those who invoke the Savior with true faith are immediately cured of the maladies of every infirmity, so that ... this figure [*figura*] of Jesus Christ seemed particularly apt to heal all ills.²⁶

As is the case with other early authors, Cavriolo's use of the word *figura* served to reference the visible figuration of Jesus – the presence of the divine on earth – and to signify the potential for salvation through the resurrected Christ.²⁷ In the physical presence of material representations of the sacred, time and space are thus collapsed as the *figura* points to a life on earth that assured an eternal life in heaven. Through his resurrection, Jesus holds forth the promise of redemption. Through her ascension, Mary does likewise. By their blessed example, so, too, do the saints tender the prospect of entry into heaven. Within the sacred ambient of the thaumaturgic shrine, the cultic image through which (*col mezzo loro*) God was held to have "healed the infirm, restored sight to the blind, and liberated others from diverse dangers," functioned fully as a *figura*: an object of tangible presence signifying intangible *praesentia*.²⁸

Despite the fact that ex-votos of myriad kinds – “offerings of gold and silver, wax and pieces of cloth, [and] garments of linen and wool” – were, according to the fifteenth-century humanist Flavio Biondo, appreciated “as striking evidence that God listens to the prayers of suppliants,” assemblages of votive pictures and popular devotional objects already were being pilfered or dismantled during the sixteenth century.²⁹ Two years after Athanasio Nelli noted the pervasion of pilgrimages to saints’ shrines and Marian sanctuaries throughout Tuscany, the abbot of San Nicola in Tolentino instructed members of the monastic community attending Nicholas’s shrine to stop exchanging (*prestare*, from the Latin *praesto*, meaning to give or bestow in the sense of to repay for a thing or service) the “*tavolette* on which are painted the miracles of Saint Nicholas” for wine, oil, wood, and flour.³⁰ A century after Tolentino’s abbot ordered the trading practice halted, a different scenario reduced the number of ex-votos at the nearby Sanctuary of the Madonna of Loreto not far from Recanati. While the monks of San Nicola recognized a *tavoletta*’s barter value, authorities tending to the Virgin’s Holy House and the statue of the Madonna that graced its altar saw little worth in things readily – and cheaply – available at shops and market stalls within and near the sanctuary complex.³¹ Assessing *immagini* to be of inconsequential material worth and wholly lacking in aesthetic merit, custodians of the site ordered the mounting accumulation of popular votives discarded as “superfluous testimonies to the holiness of the place.”³²

If the French essayist and pilgrim Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) is to be believed, even heightened material value was not an assurance of preservation. In fact, preciousness may have had a more negative than positive impact when it came to safeguarding an ex-voto from destruction and material reuse. Visiting Loreto in 1581, Montaigne noted that, though the walls of the sanctuary were encrusted with “tablets, paintings and stories” (*tableaux, peintures et histoires*) and “many rich ornaments,” “I believe they melt down the old things and use them for other purposes.”³³ Despite such actions, and regardless of the expressed view that popularly offered *voti* were “superfluous testimonies to the holiness of the place,” a few gold plaques as well as some early modern panels survived into the twenty-first century. Today, twenty-seven *tavolette votive* are displayed in glass cases on the top floor of Loreto’s museum. Interestingly, a twenty-eighth panel dedicated to the Madonna of Loreto – her identity made clear by the representation of the Holy House of Nazareth that reportedly was translated by angels from the Holy Land, then under Saracen invasion, to the Marche at the end of the thirteenth century – is at the Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli in Lonigo (Figure 15). Through unknown circumstances and for unexplained reasons, the late sixteenth-century *tavoletta*, which pictures a priest holding an open book in one hand and dispensing holy water from an aspergillum as he exorcizes a man restrained in chains, ended up



15. Anonymous, exorcism, *tavoletta votiva*, late sixteenth century. Tempera on paper affixed to panel. Panel dedicated to the Madonna of Loreto. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: Paul W. Jacobs, II)

more than three hundred kilometers away from the Madonna to whom it was offered.

The fate of popular votive objects at Loreto was by no means unique. Franco Sacchetti (ca. 1335–ca. 1400), who ridicules the practice of votive donation on more than one occasion in *Il trecentonovelle*, noted in a letter to his friend Jacopo di Conte that it was a good thing the walls of Florence’s Annunziata recently had been reinforced with chains. The then current enthusiasm for the site among the “foolish” faithful, who rush from one in-vogue “figure of Our Lady” to another, had caused the walls of the church to become so laden with *tante immagini* (a term referring generally to small anatomical casts and sometimes to generic “portrait” plaques made of wax, tin, silver, and even gold) that “they would have been in danger of coming down together with the roof” had fortifying measures not been taken.³⁴ Acerbic wit aside, Sacchetti observed what was, in fact, true. So numerous were the votives filling the Servite church sheltering the fresco of the Virgin at the moment of the Annunciation that on January 20, 1401, the prior joined forces with the city’s Gonfaloniere di Giustizia to stanch the flow of votives left on site by those who had either received or sought God’s grace through the mediation of Mary. Together, they issued a *provvisione* restricting donors of figurative

ex-votos to those who held the rights of a *uomo di Repubblica* or were members of the Arti Maggiori.³⁵

If this restrictive measure had its desired effect, it was relatively short-lived.³⁶ More importantly, it did not place constraints on *voti* offered by the *popoli*, including *tavolette votive*. In his *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, Luca Ferrini noted that, in addition to weapons from the Company of St. Sebastian attached to the walls of the “Chiostricino” and *imagini belle* fastened to a pilaster by the Chapel of Mary Magdalene, several *tavolette* had been placed “on the altar.”³⁷ A memorandum written by the Sacristan of SS. Annunziata several decades later provides a more accurate view of the votive jumble. After describing the general redistribution of votive objects that took place in 1625, Ferdinando Mancini turned his attention to the copious *tavolette dipinte* filling the church.

Speaking of painted *tavolette*, they were so great in number that all the walls of the chapels were hung and covered with them, they cluttered up all the pilasters from the capitals down, they also lined all the doors of the church both inside and outside, and in the little cloister (except where there are the little stories by the excellent painters) all the rest was occupied by these, even above the iron supports, that is to say above the rods between the arches of the columns. At that time, I counted up to three thousand six hundred.³⁸

At precisely what point steps were taken to clear away this impressively large accumulation is not documented; however, such measures appear to have been recurrent. Neither is there a recorded justification *per se* for their removal. Their disappearance from SS. Annunziata – to my knowledge, none predating the Sacristan’s memorandum have survived – is explained perhaps by an observation made by Paolo Morigia about *tavolette* at another site. Near the conclusion of the 1603 edition of *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, Morigia makes a particularly telling statement about votive panel paintings. In relating the many miraculous cures associated with the restorative waters of the Madonna del Fonte at Caravaggio, the Jesuit historian took note of what had once filled the sanctuary constructed over the spring where the poor yet pure Gianetta de’Vacchi had an apparitional visitation from Mary on May 26, 1432.³⁹ Filling the Chiesa nuova, which began to be built in 1575 at the behest of Milan’s archbishop Charles Borromeo and according to the design of Pellegrino Tibaldi, was “a great number of lost *tavolette*.”⁴⁰ In and of itself, the fact that “a great number” of panels was already lost (*smarrito*) by this date is interesting, but the coupling of this observation with another makes Morigia’s comment particularly worthy of note. The author groups the lost panels with other “infinite other things” deemed insignificant (*sono senza nota*).

The inconsequential valuation of popular votive objects observed by Morigia suggests that between the mid-fifteenth century and the advent of the

seventeenth century the attitude toward common ex-votos had shifted. The very things Flavio Biondo reported that the bishop of Loreto “kept untouched for the glory of God and the Virgin” had come to be viewed, according to Morigia, with indifference.⁴¹ This raises an obvious question. How can something once appreciated as “striking evidence” of the willing presence of heaven on earth become an insignificant object? The answer seems to reside not in the object’s materiality or facture but, rather, in a split in perceptions of valuation: those of donors versus those of the caretakers of thaumaturgic shrines. For a votary, the principal function of an ex-voto remained what it had always been: a sign of a petitioner’s fulfillment of a sacred pledge to honor an intercessor, a testament to a miraculous cure or rescue. For the institutional authorities invested with the task of maintaining and promoting a site in which these things accumulated, such individualized statements of piety counted for less than the indexical effect of the ensemble as a whole. While great collections of votives were, as contemporaneous texts indicate, impressive sights fostering a belief in the efficacy of a particular thaumaturge and inspiring a beholder to similarly place faith in and thus contribute a votive (and alms) to that specific saint’s shrine, they were moored to a place. Nailed to walls, set atop altars, and tied to rods spanning chapels, ex-votos could be seen *only* by shrine visitors. In this regard, ex-votos were of restricted promotional value. Given the competition among an increasing number of sites to attract supplicants from a limited pool of pilgrims needing amenities and desiring votive objects and souvenirs, this was a factor of financial consequence.⁴²

Pilgrims were a boon to local economies. In fact, piety and commerce went hand in hand.⁴³ In the latter half of the fifteenth century, for example, Alessio Borella, who had come to Loreto from Bergamo, provided pilgrims visiting Mary’s Holy House with the necessary amenities for a good night’s rest. His inn was equipped with no less than twenty-nine beds fitted with blankets, cushions, and fifty-four sheets.⁴⁴ According to Montaigne, Borella’s financial dependency on pilgrims was not exceptional. Loreto, “a little village enclosed in walls,” had “hardly any other inhabitants than those in the service of this cult, such as many innkeepers – and yet the lodgings are rather dirty – and many tradesmen, sellers of wax, of images, rosaries, *Agnus Dei*,” and the like.⁴⁵ In *L’historia della traslatione della Santa Casa della Madonna a Loreto*, an elaboration of Pietro di Giorgio Tolomei’s popular account (1472) of the shrine’s history that was published first in Latin in 1531 and then in the vernacular in 1575, Girolamo Angelitta too comments on the marketing of devotional goods, which in their off-site circulation helped direct others through the “complex process whereby a selection [of an intercessor] is made and must be made out of the store of connotations, values and symbols.”⁴⁶ In the great forecourt fronting the sanctuary, numerous *mercanti* sold beads strung on twine “called *Corone* [Rosaries] ..., *immagini* of the Virgin stamped in tin, silver, and

gold, figurines [*statue*], torches, and candles, [and] quantities of white wax.”⁴⁷ As Montaigne, Angelitta, and others state, souvenirs, which most typically took the form of an image of the Madonna printed on cheap paper or stamped into metal or wax, were also easily had. Beginning in the sixteenth century, pilgrims were offered yet another way to recall their journey, one that was especially personal (and transportable). Memory was no longer dependent upon a tangible memento, nor was it restricted to an unseen image – the *figura* – impressed on the soul of the pious visitor. A devotee’s body could take the place of wax or metal as a surface on which to imprint a mnemonic image. More than sixty patterns carved of boxwood used to stencil tattoos on the arms of the faithful can still be found at Loreto.⁴⁸

Like local merchants and innkeepers, the monastic communities tending to a site were beneficiaries of pilgrim spending as well as pilgrim largess. The distinction between the two reflects donor intent and awareness. How donations of oil, grain, firewood, and other consumable commodities were to be used was certainly understood by donors. These things were recognized as doing double duty. They helped to sustain the clergy and, by extension, honored the saint whose shrine the recipients maintained.⁴⁹ Like firewood and farina, a candle was also consumptive. Moreover, like other fungible commodities, it performed several practical functions. It marked a votary’s fulfillment of a vow, honored the intercessor, and provided illumination. Moreover, at Marian shrines candles had particular metaphoric value. Among her many titles, the Virgin is *Illuminatrix* (light-giver), or *Illuminata* (the enlightened), because “she received the light with which she then enlightened [*illustravit*] others.”⁵⁰ But candles, especially those made of costly white wax, had value potential beyond the devotional function for which they were purchased. Because of their commercial profitability, candles were rarely allowed to burn completely. At some sites they were a source of revenue. After a set period of time, a lit candle was extinguished, the remaining wax collected then sold to a *bottega della cera* for the production of other candles that then would be sold to other pilgrims. Documents from the Sanctuary of the Holy House in Loreto record this recycling-for-profit process starting in 1417. On the Feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary, September 8, the Carmelite brothers, who then were attending the site, sold 244 libbre (approximately 77 kilograms) of gathered wax to a nearby workshop. Clearly the practice produced enough profit to step up efforts to collect the valued material. A little more than a year later, on January 6, 1419, 2,000 libbre passed from the industrious hands of the monks to those of candlemakers and fabricators of *immagini* of cast wax.⁵¹ Although a sanctioned practice, this economically creative use of candles parallels the unsanctioned trading of *tavolette votive* for food and fuel by the monks of San Nicola.

Collaborative and bartering practices between clergy and *ceraioli* or *contadini* aside, monastic communities generally could count on monetary donations

in addition to the receipt of consumptive goods, altar furnishings, and clerical vestments. Shrine inventories indicate that alms almost always accompanied a votive object, which may or may not possess the inherent material value of precious metals and gems. Yet pietistic altruism was also in evidence. Although Montaigne admits to spending no small sum in Loreto's shops, he nonetheless noted in his travel journal that in some instances monetary gain had no place in commercial transactions. The price paid for objects that were to be left on site "for the sake of the church" was in some cases no more than the cost of the wood or silver used in their fabrication. Some craftsmen, believing that through their skill they shared in the grace of the act of donation, sought to do no more than recover the expense of the raw material.⁵² Any monetary gain to be had went into the institution's coffers rather than the pockets of the producer. Of course, there were also those who were more than ready to take advantage of a pilgrim's heightened sense of charity or, should the desire arise, provide at a cost carnal release in the wake of a spiritual cleansing. Beggars and prostitutes also populated the site.⁵³

As local authorities were well aware, all of this economic activity depended on the presence of pilgrims. In the quest to entice the pious to visit one site rather than another, *ex-votos* played a decidedly limited promotional role. This objective was better served by the spread of a recently invented technology: the printing press. Printed media – pamphlets, miracle books, and prints – could do what stationary things could not. They had the capacity to spread the word across expansive distances. Transportable and replicable, printed materials had the potential to advertise a site well beyond a sanctuary's walls and even beyond regional boundaries.⁵⁴ Among these promotional materials, of special note are miracle books like Luca Ferrini's *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata* and single sheet prints. In the specific case of the former, a woodcut vignette accompanies each of the miracles Ferrini recounted. The similarity between these illustrations (Figure 16) and *tavolette* (Figure 8) is unmistakable. Still, it seems unlikely that *tavolette* were the originating source for the compositional arrangements that are characteristic of popular promotional prints, including the woodcuts in *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli*. Visual vocabulary points instead toward scenes of miracle enactment included in altarpiece predellas (Figures 17 and 18). Scant incidental detail, settings most often suggested rather than specifically defined, and space restricted by and large to the foreground are hallmarks of both votive and predella panels. Most notable is their shared, and hence very legible, lexicon of gestures. Whether it be an illustration in *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli*, a *tavoletta*, or, for example, a panel from the predella of Piero della Francesca's *Perugia Polyptych*, figures express despondency by supporting their heads on a hand balled into a fist, convey anxious fear by dramatically thrusting arms into the air, communicate exhaustion by slumping into the supportive arms of others, and impart pious gratitude by clasping their hands in prayer. In



16. Luca Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 1593, 55v: The son of Niccolò Marino Vandini survives a fall in 1544. Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana (MAG 6.A.XII.8). (Photo: reproduced with permission of the Biblioteca Marucelliana, all rights reserved)

all likelihood, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century promotional prints loosely replicated the already familiar vocabulary that painters of *tavolette* adopted from predellas. This is especially evident in the case of single-sheet prints that were formatted to surround a central image of the intercessor with anywhere between six and twenty episodic scenes of miraculous cures and rescues (Figure 19).

Subsequent centuries witnessed further campaigns to remove objects of popular piety from sacred sites, which at times were also susceptible to harmful, if not ruinous, policies. The suppression of monastic communities, including some that had been charged with overseeing a cultic shrine, was a principal cause of loss during the eighteenth century. One can only hazard a guess as to the number of panels at Lonigo's Madonna dei Miracoli before the sanctuary was ordered closed by the Venetian senate in 1768 and then sold to a nobleman several years later.⁵⁵ Remarkably, about 200 of the 357 panels



17. Anonymous, child in cradle (possibly an infant resuscitation), *tavoletta votiva*, sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Cesena, Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte. (Photo: author)

now preserved in a small locked room within the church date between circa 1490 and circa 1600. Several decades after the closing of Lonigo's Marian shrine, the ex-votos at Viterbo were rescued from a different foe. During the Napoleonic occupation, custodians of the Madonna della Quercia sequestered in a nearby cave as many of the sanctuary's treasures as was possible, including two tattered standards from the Battle of Lepanto and dozens of *tavolette votive*. Today, about seventy votive pictures are secured in a chapel barred by an iron gate. Natural disasters have proved no less a source of devastation. At the Oratory of Sant'Andrea in Belluno (Veneto), an earthquake in 1873 reduced the number of panels dedicated to the Madonna from 360 to 115. Of the surviving total now in the Museo Civico, less than a quarter can be dated to the sixteenth century.

A notable number of the more than 750 sixteenth-century *tavolette votive* at the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco located on the outskirts of Naples points to yet another culprit. Many panels are marred by puncture holes. In some cases the hole obviously caused a panel to split and fragment. An explanation for these punctures is found not only in early descriptions of sanctuary interiors and devotional practices but also in the current behaviors of pilgrims to the site. Votive placement was, and remains, important. After spending the night within the Sanctuary of the Madonna of Loreto, Montaigne, for example, recounted his attempt to "fix and nail to the wall" his votive portrait plaque as close as



18. Piero della Francesca, St. Anthony of Padua resuscitates a child, predella panel, Perugia Polyptych, circa 1465. Oil and tempera on panel. Perugia, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York)

possible to the statue of the Virgin within the Holy House.⁵⁶ His quest should be considered against an observation by the Sacristan of SS. Annunziata. In this revered sacred space, *tavolette* “lined all the doors of the church both inside and outside.” Securing appropriate votive placement was not an easy task, and it certainly was not specific to Montaigne’s efforts at Loreto in 1581 or one that ended with the modern age. Current custodians at the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco report the all too frequent arrival of devotees bearing a votive picture in one hand and a hammer and nails in the other.

Finally, it must be said, sadly, that disappearance is more often than not unexplained. The Sanctuary of Montecastello located high above Lake Garda by Tignale is known to have had at least some sixteenth-century *tavolette*, including one vowed in 1557 to the Madonna by the pregnant “Donna Laura” of Salo after she fell from a horse without suffering any ill effects.⁵⁷ Today, the only image resembling an ex-voto within the church and its monastic sanctuary is a painting celebrating Mary’s intervention on behalf of Brescian soldiers engaged in battle with Trent. While the painting’s theme suggests the work was offered as an ex-voto, the size is not typical of *tavolette*. It is more than three



19. Apparition of the Madonna of Tirano and Her Miracles, late sixteenth century. Engraving. Private collection. (Photo: author)

times larger than most panels. Moreover, the date of the purported miracle, 1283, does not accord with the style of the painting, suggesting that it was a commemorative remembrance painted several hundreds years after the battle rather than a votive offered in the immediate wake of the pictured event. While conducting research for this book, I had numerous conversations with older members of communities adjacent to thaumaturgic shrines. They remember family visits to sacred sites prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and recall the awesome impression of seeing what is no longer visible: vast arrays of ex-votos of all kinds. One day, they say, authorities removed these things, supposedly for safekeeping. The removed *voti* have yet to be returned to their rightful places. Auction catalogs suggest some have fed the growing taste of collectors for “folk art.”

AN OBJECT WITHIN A COMPLEX

Suffering from kidney stones and in search of relief, Michel de Montaigne undertook a pilgrimage to Rome, arriving at the Porta del Popolo on the last day of November 1580 and leaving by the Ponte Molle on April 3, 1581. During the intervening months he took in the ancient sites and, during Holy Week, followed the pilgrim’s path connecting the city’s seven great basilicas as it wends its way from St. John the Lateran to Santa Maria Maggiore and on to Santa Maria Nova. In his travel diary he commented on the rich variety of sights he encountered: courtesans on display at brothel windows, the execution of a notorious bandit, flagellants “who scourged themselves ... all raw and bloody,” and the pious prostrating themselves, “most of them with tears in their eyes [and] cries of commiseration” in response to witnessing the ceremonious presentation of the Veronica.⁵⁸ Having taken it all in, Montaigne began his journey back to France, traveling a route that would lead him through Viterbo, where he stopped to visit the church of the miracle-working Madonna della Quercia; past Tolentino (he opted to bypass the shrine preserving the thaumaturgic relics of Saint Nicholas); and on to Recanati, where he remained for several days to honor the Madonna of Loreto.

Montaigne’s actions at Loreto were clearly those of a votary.⁵⁹ First, he purchased a silver plaque “set with four figures: that of Our Lady, myself, my wife, and my daughter.” Next, he nailed it to the wall just left of a door providing access into the Madonna’s Holy House, which by this date was encased in marble reliefs relating the life of Mary and the story of the Holy House, which, it was said, had miraculously translated from Nazareth to the safety of Italy’s eastern coast. Carved by Baccio Bandinelli, Raffaello da Montelupo, Nicolò Tribolo, Andrea Sansovino, Francesco da Sangallo, and other notable masters, the lavish structure was itself a marvel to behold.⁶⁰ Remaining within this most sacred space, Montaigne attended Mass in the company of “a German Jesuit”

and took the Easter Sacrament, “a privilege not granted to all, as another chapel is provided for this function because of the huge crowds.” Montaigne’s concentrated piety did not interfere with his observance of the actions of others.

As I was in the sanctuary, along comes a man who offers the first priest he meets a silver cup, saying that he had made a vow to do so; and because he had vowed to spend twelve *escus*, which the cup did not amount to, he promptly paid the surplus to the said priest, who argued for the payment of the money as for a thing very exactly due, in order to help in the complete and conscientious execution of his promise; that done he had this man enter this sanctuary, offer his chalice himself to Our Lady, and say a short prayer there; and the money he threw into the common alms box. These examples [of faith] they [custodial priests] see everyday.⁶¹

While neither Montaigne nor the man with the silver chalice seems to have performed all twenty-two acts recommended for visitors to the Holy House that are detailed in Girolamo Angelitta’s *L’historia della traslatione della Santa Casa della Madonna a Loreto*, both combined the offering of a votive object with other material and nonmaterial devotions.⁶² Hugo van der Velden has aptly called this combination of intangible acts and substantive objects a “votive complex” in which the constituent elements “served different functions.”⁶³ In addition to subscribing to set practices and beyond reflecting a donor’s financial means, the functional differences among *voti* undoubtedly factored in a votary’s decision to choose one votive form rather than another or even to pair offerings, such as a self-reflective *tavoletta* and alms for the poor. One remained visible to sanctuary visitors. Deposited into coffers, the other did not.

To help distinguish one element of the complex from another, Van der Velden devised a chart differentiating votive “acts” from votive “objects.” He further subdivided each group into “non-utilitarian” and “utilitarian” categories.⁶⁴ The latter includes “consumptive” things, such as money for alms and commodities like grain, oil, and firewood for the sustenance of the clergy. “Oblatory” things that “played a role in church services,” like liturgical vestments, as well as “honorary” things, such as the gold diadems crowning representations of the Queen of Heaven, are also classified “utilitarian.” Among the votives Van der Velden tags “non-utilitarian” are “conventional” objects “donated in connection with a specific type of event” and “iconic” images, which range from “simple wax limbs” to elaborately crafted effigies and portrait busts. “Narrative” paintings (*tavolette*), “which generally depicted the votary, the patron, and the incident occasioning the vow,” also fall under the heading “non-utilitarian” objects. Unfortunately, they do not factor into Van der Velden’s discussion of Northern European ex-votos because there is simply little or no mention of them in inventories of the period and place he examines.

Recently, Robert Maniura revisited Van der Velden’s contention that a *voto* is a composite. While he does not dispute the notion that a votive is a

complex that comprises both acts and objects, he questions separating one aspect or element from another. “What makes the [votive] meaningful is not its [non-material, material, utilitarian, non-utilitarian] form but the fact that it has been given.” In his view, “The material outcome of each vow was an artifact, but what was vowed in each case was an action: to make, to offer, to place.”⁶⁵ Therefore, Maniura suggests a shift of attention away from the votive as object to the votive as act. His proposal is just, because a votive is, as David Summers has noted, an act of offering. From *ob-ferre*, “to carry before or against,” an offering in its complete compounded expression “involves approach, and its fundamental ... values of proximity.”⁶⁶ A pilgrim journeys from one place to another. He then enters into the sacred space and reverentially advances toward the representation or relic of the thaumaturge before returning to where his travels began. But Maniura’s argument does not explain the rise in popularity of *tavolette*, which, by reason of their depiction of the donor in communion with her or his intercessor, are decidedly self-referential. Moreover, the addition of a dedicatory inscription ensured that one person’s offering was not confused with someone else’s. Admittedly, stock images like those at Viterbo mitigate individuation, yet even these had reserved spaces for personalized inscriptions. The form of a votive mattered. So did its placement.

Within the institutional space of the shrine, proximity to the sacred counted for a lot. The practice of burying rulers beneath the crossing of churches and therefore close to the high altar – the site of Cosimo de’ Medici’s internment in San Lorenzo comes readily to mind – points to this fact. So, too, do efforts by pilgrims to place their votive offerings close to or within clear sight of holy relics, saints’ tombs, and sacred representations, all of which asserted sacred presence (*praesentia*). Indeed, to position a *tavoletta* near or facing the representation of the responsive saint was to spatially structure a dialogue between resemblant presences: that of the votary and that of intercessor. The dynamics of this spatial relationship transformed, as Trexler observed, *ex-votos* into “secondary relics” that participate in “the sacrality of the holy objects themselves.”⁶⁷ Montaigne’s pilgrimage to Loreto, as well as his attempt to place his *vœu* within the Holy House and thus within unobstructed sight of the statue of the Madonna positioned on the altar within, underscores what was well understood in cultic culture. Carried into a Marian sanctuary or saint’s shrine then propped against, set before, placed around, and even suspended above a sacred representation or tomb, *tavolette*, *immagini*, candles, and other material *voti* are objects functionally situated within a series of actions informed by expectations and prescribed acts that are themselves rooted in the conventions of pietistic practices. Things and actions are inseparable. One element within the complex accrues meaning in conjunction with the others. As pictures relating a confronted crisis, *tavolette* did this in a particularly legible way.

The dynamics of this complex is conveyed best perhaps by an eyewitnessed account of the offering of a *tavoletta* described in the miracle book of the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco located on the road between Naples and Nola. Before turning to the recounted incident, it is important to note what distinguishes this entry from the 163 others included in the *Compendio dell'istoria, miracoli e gratie della Madonna Santissima dell'Arco* compiled by the sanctuary's prior, Fra Arcangelo Domenici, and dated 1608. First, at more than double the length of any other entry and ten to fifteen times longer than the typical cursory references citing a donor's name, the nature of the miracle, and a date – for example, Giovan Domenico Russo's fever broke, and hence he visited the shrine on September 15, 1592 – it is singular. The length is explained, at least in part, by the second distinguishing feature of the entry. Much of what is contained in this particular passage focuses on what Fra Arcangelo professed to have seen. Consequently, the descriptive entry, a *testimoniale di veduta*, has an aura of reliability that is unusual in texts of this kind. Because miracle books were promotional, they tended to be selective rather than comprehensive. Often they include *miracoli* that happened decades and even centuries before the book was composed. While there is no shortage of accounts of miraculous recoveries from illness and injury in these compendia, spectacular events were appreciated as especially effectual testaments of efficacy. As stated, many of these incidences occurred in the distant past, surviving by oral tradition. For example, miracle seven in Ferrini's *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata* recounts an event that had been put to verse, printed, and passed down by children and women reciting it in the streets of Florence.⁶⁸ In fact, many of the stories Ferrini included in his book were culled from an older manuscript in SS. Annunziata's library.⁶⁹ Apart from the usually detailed retelling of the more astonishing *miracoli*, miracle collections otherwise repeat incidents told to sanctuary custodians. In the *Compendio dell'istoria, miracoli e gratie della Madonna Santissima dell'Arco*, these tend to be brief. Thus, Fra Arcangelo Domenici's protracted narrative of Gian Jacopo Grandone's votive donation – a donation in which the prior played an active role – offers an exceptional glimpse at religious experience in late sixteenth-century Italy. It is a glimpse that reveals the votive complex in all of its complexity.

Since the fifteenth century, pilgrims have trekked to Sant'Anastasia, a small *comune* thirteen kilometers northeast of Naples. As the sanctuary's walls continue to attest (Figure 20), devotees came – and still do come – in order to fulfill a vow made to the Madonna dell'Arco. Covered with thousands of silver *immagini* and *tavolette*, the encrusted walls present visitors to the site with an inventory of the Madonna's many acts of intercession, at once complementing visually the registry of miracles recounted in Fra Arcangelo Domenici's *Compendio* and extending its record through later centuries and into the present. By 1608, the date Fra Arcangelo inscribed on his *libro dei miracoli*, the site



20. View from nave toward transept. Naples, Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco. (Photo: author)

had received the offerings of hundreds if not thousands of grateful petitioners. As Pope Gregory XIV was notified in 1591 and as Fra Arcangelo was later to state, a “multitude” of *persone nobili et plebe* journeyed to the shrine of the most holy Madonna dell’Arco at every hour of each day.⁷⁰ Kneeling before a wall fragment frescoed with an image of the Madonna and Child, pious petitioners could see with their own eyes evidence of the Madonna’s first purported miracle: a *trasfigurazione*. The “bruised” face of the image was understood as a mark signaling sacredness, vivid – and vivified – proof of holy immanence.

Although the date is in dispute, on the Monday following Easter, 1450, the Madonna dell’Arco demonstrated her remarkable nature. A game of *pallamaglio*, a precursor to croquet, was underway next to a roadside shrine when the ball got tangled in the branches of a lime tree shading the *edicola* that protected the fresco of the Madonna from the elements. The entanglement caused one of the players to lose a point. Infuriated, the angry player flung the ball at the painted image in the roadside shrine while hurling blasphemous insults at the Madonna. The assault caused the Madonna dell’Arco to bleed and bruise and the offending player to be summarily hanged from the lime tree, which then withered and died. The purported bleeding of the image was catalytic. Word of the transfiguration spread quickly, devotees arrived day and night, and a wave of ever-larger building projects designed to accommodate an ever-increasing number of pilgrims began.

A second and equally impressive miracle occurred in 1589. Like the first, it happened on the Monday following Easter. A peasant woman identified as Aurelia del Prete and characterized by Fra Arcangelo as “diabolical, bestial, and cruel” had come to the Marian shrine with the dual objectives of facilitating her sick husband’s return to health and offering two wax casts of feet in commemorative thanks for her own recovery from a foot injury. Her good intentions were thwarted when the pigs she was herding broke free from their tethers, causing general chaos among the assembled crowd. Struggling to regain control of the errant pigs, Aurelia dropped the *immagini* and, like the *pallamaglio* player, cursed the Madonna instead of humbly soliciting her aid with dutiful prayers. Upon returning home, the hapless woman recounted the morning’s events and, despite the urgings of her husband, belligerently refused to return to the sanctuary to make amends. It was an unwise decision. Exactly one year later, Aurelia del Prete’s feet fell off.⁷¹ Word of Aurelia’s fate spread rapidly, prompting a new wave of impassioned pilgrims. In 1596 a commissioner of imperial revenue for the province of Frosinone, Gian Jacopo Grandone, joined the throng of devotees acknowledging the efficacy of the Madonna dell’Arco, her cheek still bearing the signs of injury from the ball that had struck her image almost 150 years earlier.

According to Fra Arcangelo, Grandone arrived at the entrance to the sanctuary on January 6. He was not alone. Neither did he come empty-handed. With him were his father, mother, wife, children, and a servant. In his hand was a small painted panel, alternately described in the *Compendio* as a *quadro del voto* or *quadro dipinto*. Grandone’s clothes, tattered and bloodstained, indicated that he had survived a terrible ordeal. Recalling twelve years later all he witnessed that day, Fra Arcangelo described the ensuing scene as one of dramatic intensity.⁷² Having entered the sanctuary and immediately dropping to their knees, Grandone and his family began to make their way down the nave toward the remnants of the wall on which the Madonna and Christ Child were painted. As they progressed, their sighs and prayerful cries grew louder and the flow of “copious” tears streaming down their faces increased. Those who had gathered for Mass turned to watch and listen.

When at last Grandone arrived in front of Fra Arcangelo, he handed the *frate* two things: a ducat for alms and the small *quadro del voto*. Fra Arcangelo, who says he had been gazing upon the “most sacred image” (*sacratissima imagine*) of the Madonna dell’Arco and contemplating “the greatness of her miracles” (*la grandezza di miracoli*) when Gian Jacopo and his family entered the church, looked down at the painting that had been placed in his hands and “read” its explanatory inscription (*la soprascritta ... sta affissa nella sua tabella*). Overcome by emotion, he addressed the assembled congregants. The Queen of Heaven, who had already performed so many wondrous marvels (*cose meravigliose*), he told them, continued to do so. Grandone’s presence among them, he declared,

was an attestation to this fact. Motivated perhaps by this avowal, Gian Jacopo stripped down to his undergarments, revealing to all the veracity of the prior's pronouncement. Shouts of "Misericordia" arose at the sight of his *orribilissimo* body, scarred by no less than thirty-five knife wounds inflicted by four armed bandits, who, having relieved him of the 618 ducats he had collected as a commissioner of revenue, left him for dead in a ditch beside the road. Now, many in the crowd began to cry as well. Some, unable to believe what their eyes could see but their minds could not grasp, reached out to touch the disfiguring wounds. When at last Gian Jacopo, now swathed in a white robe, departed the sanctuary he left behind his bloodied shirt and the *quadro del voto*, which he requested to be "put in a privileged place." As for the ripped and stained *camicia*, it was hung from a tying rod spanning the opening of the chapel from which Fra Arcangelo had observed the heart-rending scene and in which he had received the votary's *tavoletta votiva*. There it reportedly remained suspended "for many months."

Although the general tone of the *Compendio* resonates with other miracle books touting the efficacy of other sacred sites – in the time between witnessing Grandone's donation and writing the *Compendio*, construction aimed at significantly expanding the sanctuary was begun, and the *frate* had been made its prior – Fra Arcangelo's flare for relating the miraculous was especially well gauged. Gian Jacopo Grandone did not prostrate himself before the Madonna dell'Arco on just any day. He did so on January 6, Epiphany. The significance of the day did not escape the prior. Fra Arcangelo's unusually detailed account of the response of the incredulous crowd cannot help but bring to mind Thomas's post-Resurrection and epiphanic encounter with Jesus Christ. Not unlike the doubtful apostle, who had to verify the truth of the miracle that is Christ by touching His wounded side, many of those listening to Grandone's tale felt compelled to confirm the spiritual truth of his salvation through tactile inquiry. The prior's clear allusion to Thomas needs to be considered within the larger context of efforts by the Catholic Church to foster dedication among the faithful and combat challenges to and deviations from sanctioned practices. As Thomas Aquinas asserted, there should be no doubt that grace, "being ordered to something sacred," must be understood "not only as a sign, but also as a cause." Hence the common phrase "'they effect what they signify.'" ⁷³

In 1598, two years after the revenue collector's miraculous survival and subsequent pilgrimage to Naples, Bologna's archbishop, Alfonso Paleotti (1531–1610) published his *Esplicatione del lenzuolo ove fu involto il Signore, & delle piaghe in esso impresse col suo pretioso sangue confrontate con la Scrittura profeti e padri*, an exposition on the Shroud of Turin and Christ's wounds. Like other Catholic reformers, including his well-known brother Gabriele Paleotti, and in concert with the then current zeal for apostolic missionary saints, Alfonso urged the laity to renew and reaffirm its faith by reenacting Thomas's actions. By

February 20, 1608, the date inscribed on the dedicatory page of the *Compendio*, Paleotti's *Esplicatione* had been reprinted several times – in 1599, in 1602, and, as one of several tracts on the subject bound into a single volume, in 1607.

In addition to providing a vivid account of the devotional behaviors attending votive donation, Fra Arcangelo's text defines the votive complex as a performance composed of interlocked components of people and things.⁷⁴ The dynamics of offering joins the votary to the intercessor, unites him in communion with other pilgrims, and connects a variety of objects and images (a *quadro del voto* and *camica*) to others (the fresco of the Madonna dell'Arco and other *voti*) within a sacred setting activated by both votive ritual and liturgical practice. Moreover, and not unlike a *tavoletta*'s representation of the votary, the performed offering can be seen as a reflexive presentation of self in addition to a reflective portrayal of the attendant saint. Fra Arcangelo's account of Grandone's actions – and description of his body and the response to it – communicates this in an especially poignant manner. Indeed, it suggests that an ex-voto's status as a "secondary relic" can be expanded to include the donor himself. Albeit to varying degrees, all votaries assumed something of an evidentiary role, at least while they were within the communal space of a shrine performing votive rituals. As Fra Arcangelo observed of Grandone, the very presence of the votary was proof that a miracle had occurred through the intercessory grace of one of God's saints. But bodies heal and pilgrims return home. By contrast, an ex-voto remains on site for months if not years. There, it continues to convey what the votary himself had communicated through his or her temporary presence. As pictures, *tavolette* performed this evidentiary function in a manner that was graphically clear.

Sadly, Gian Jacopo's *quadro dipinto* with its elucidating inscription cannot be identified among the existing sixteenth-century *tavolette* preserved at the Neapolitan sanctuary. However, because votive pictures throughout Italy tend to be formulaic in their presentation of like events, it is possible to glean through comparisons with other panels depicting attacks what it may have looked like. Two late sixteenth-century examples, one from Viterbo and the other from Lonigo, serve this purpose. The Viterbo picture, a rudimentary rendering on paper that was then affixed to a panel and dedicated to the Madonna della Quercia, tells the tale with an economy of means (Figure 21). Four assailants converge on their prey. With a raised club, one prepares to strike the victim. Another levels a blow to the unfortunate man's bleeding head with his left hand while grasping the wretch's wrist with his right. Echoing the restraining gesture intended to prevent the victim from protecting himself, a third assailant holds down the other arm as a fourth attacker, his weapon at the ready, approaches the skirmish. Overpowered, the man directs his gaze – and ours – toward the panel's top left corner. There, pictured in half length among the clouds, the Madonna della Quercia hears her suppliant's call for help. In



21. Anonymous, assault scene, *tavoletta votiva*, late sixteenth century. Ink and wash on paper affixed to panel. Viterbo, Il Museo degli Ex-voto, Sanctuary of the Madonna della Quercia. (Photo: Paul W. Jacobs, II)

this scene of aggression, the artist depicted the victim with the greatest amount of detail. He alone, or rather his breeches and topcoat, has received a thin application of wash. Together with the figure's central placement and splayed posture, the wash silhouettes the victim – and presumed votary – against the field of contour lines used to indicate the four assailants as well as describe the Madonna's intercessory presence.

A panel painted in tempera and now in the Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli at Lonigo that represents a similar scene of violent confrontation (Figure 22) stands in stylistic opposition to the Viterbo *tavoletta*. Like the Viterbo picture, the Lonigo painting captures the hostility of the moment. However, in contrast to the Viterbo image, which lacks even a meager suggestion of place and space, the Lonigo *tavoletta* defines where the assault took place. Beneath an arcade fronting *botteghe*, three men ambush a fourth. One, his back to the viewer, raises his weapon with his right hand as he reaches with his left to grab the neck of his victim, who attempts with obvious futility to turn and flee. With attention focused on the clash, two additional figures rush into the sheltered space. Only the attacked man faces forward. His frontal position



22. Anonymous, assault scene, possibly offered by Matteo della Riva de Zari, *tavoletta votiva*, sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: with kind permission of Santa Maria dei Miracoli)

enables him to both confront his assailant and direct a plea for salvation to the Madonna dei Miracoli, who is depicted in the top center of the panel. Pictured in three-quarter length and set against the golden light of heaven bounded by clouds, she holds a prominent place directly above the point where the arches spring from the squared column that bisects the painting. In his *L'istoria della gloriosa imagine della Madonna di Lonigo* of 1605, Giovanni Domenico Bertani recorded factual information detailing some of the specifics of the incident. On “the fourth hour of the night,” Matteo della Riva de Zari was “set upon by his enemies.” Using lances (*partesane*), they inflicted several wounds. The severity of the assault was such that “everyone deemed him dead” (*ogn’uno lo giudicò per morto*). In this dreadful state, Matteo vowed himself (*si votò*) to the Madonna dei Miracoli. Assessing Matteo’s merits, the Holy Mother in turn intervened to heal him. “Within a few days,” Matteo appeared as if he had never been harmed. In recognition of this *miracolo*, the rescued Matteo “had



23. Anonymous, votary in sickbed. *tavoletta votiva*, sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: with kind permission of Santa Maria dei Miracoli)

a representation made in the way he had received his wounds, as can be seen from the inscription” (*fece fare una Statua nel modo, che gli furono date le ferrite, che si vede con l’iscrizione*).⁷⁵

Among the ex-votos remaining at the Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli, this panel matches best Bertani’s description, yet there are obvious inconsistencies. The testamentary object is a *tavoletta*, or *quadro dipinto*, and not a *statua* (a term I opt to translate in this context as “representation”). Moreover, the panel lacks an inscription. This apparent discrepancy can be explained. Many inscriptions were written on paper and pasted to either a panel’s recto or verso. Over time these easily could be lost. As for Bertani’s use of the term *statua*, it is possible that it is simply an authorial error given the rest of the sentence, which says it disclosed “the way he had received his wounds.” This statement has other significance. It underscores the fact that a picture has the potential for specificity. The represented circumstances of attack – a blow to the head with a blunt instrument in the case of the Viterbo panel versus assault with a sharp dagger aimed at the upper chest in that of the Lonigo *tavoletta* – point to definite incidents.

The Viterbo and Lonigo *tavolette* provide some sense of what Gian Jacopo Grandone’s votive picture probably looked like. Still, its absence from the Neapolitan sanctuary and hence our inability to view the represented scene and read its dedicatory inscription, which Fra Arcangelo suggests was

informative, make it impossible to appreciate fully the effect it had on later visitors to the site. Nonetheless, what is most crucial here is not the representation and inscription per se, which is discussed in [Chapter III](#), but rather the prior's description of the votive complex as a web of relationships between people and things. Although *tavolette* rarely visualize something other than the incident that occasioned a petitioner's call for help, for example, Fedra Inghirami pinned beneath the wheels of an ox-drawn cart ([Figure 13](#)) or, more simply, a donor in his or her sickbed in thankful prayer ([Figure 23](#)), there are some panels that suggest other components of the votive complex. The most common was the recitation of the rosary, a form of prayer that combined vocal entreaty with meditation on the mysteries and events in the lives of Jesus and Mary.

Fostered by the Dominicans, the rosary acquired popularity during the fifteenth century. On the one hand, the collection of *tavolette* at Viterbo's Sanctuary of the Madonna della Quercia, which includes a significant number of panels featuring the votary with a rosary prominently displayed, reflect the general popularity of the prayer. On the other, they reference a specific and ongoing tie between this site and the *Angelus*, a devotional prayer practiced by reciting as versicle and response three biblical passages alternating with three Hail Marys. In 1481 Pope Sixtus IV (1471–84), whose bulls *Cum prae excelsa* (1476) and *Grave nimis* (1483), promoted devotion to Mary's Immaculacy, approved the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary dedicated to the Madonna della Quercia, who was “already celebrated in many places for her *stupendi miracoli*.”⁷⁶ Henceforth, “all faithful Christians whether of one sex or the other who are truly penitent and confessed” and who visit the sanctuary and recite the requisite prayers on the Sunday immediately following the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin (September 8), a day on which Mary was extolled as *Mediatrix*, would be granted a perpetual plenary indulgence.⁷⁷ In 1572 Pope Pius V (1566–72) credited the victory of the Holy League over the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto waged on October 7 of the previous year to the intercession of the Virgin. She had, he declared, responded to a rosary procession offered before the Basilica of St. Peter's on the very day that Christian and Ottoman forces clashed. In honor of Mary's bestowal of grace, Pius established October 7 as the Feast of Our Lady of Victory.⁷⁸ This had particular significance for the sanctuary at Viterbo. Among the site's most treasured ex-votos are two tattered and faded flags. Taken from Turkish vessels at Lepanto, they were donated to the Madonna della Quercia by Pius V. In light of all of this, a seemingly inconsequential detail on a *tavoletta* acquires meaning. *Tavolette* representing a supplicant with the rosary not only document a votary's fulfillment of a vow *per grazia ricevuta* but also record an act that secured a remission of sin (*pro remedio animae*).

THE CHECKERED HISTORY OF ACKNOWLEDGING MIRACLES

As the brief sampling of early textual sources quoted in the preceding section indicates, ex-votos were alternately appreciated as “striking evidence that God listens to the prayers of suppliants” and depreciated as “insignificant” and “superfluous testimonies” to holiness and faith. Neither appraisal was new. Both can be found in classical texts. In the *Fasti*, Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE) speaks of “a long fence ... draped with hanging threads, and many a tablet [*multa tabella*] attesting to the merit of the goddess” Diana.⁷⁹ In book eight of the *Metamorphoses* he provides a better understanding of the nature of this godly merit in a nostalgic and celebratory passage on ancient religious practices. In a grove sacred to Ceres stood a “mighty oak ... itself a grove.” “Around it hung sacrificial fillets, commemorative tablets and garlands; manifestations of efficacious vows [*voti argumenta potentis*].”⁸⁰ These votive tablets, or *pinakes* (πίνακες), were either flat painted panels or stone panels carved in low relief, some of which were in all likelihood painted. Often they were suspended on a chain side by side with small, propitious figures, little masks, or round, rectangular, or shield-shaped (*pelta*) low-relief panels, or *oscilli*, that, as Virgil (70–19 BCE) describes in *Georgics*, would swing back and forth in the breeze as masked dedicants honored Bacchus with ancestral hymns. The landscape affirmed the belief expressed by the god’s celebrants and oscillating objects. “Every vineyard teems with mellowing fruit.”⁸¹

Not all ancient writers looked at votives – and votaries – in the same positive way. With a ridiculing tongue, Cicero (106–43 BCE) verbalized what his jaundiced eye perceived. In *De natura deorum*, the Roman statesman constructed an anachronistic conversation between two visitors to a Samothracian shrine: one an unnamed man whose faith in divine intercession accords with that expressed by Ovid and Virgil, the other the impious Diagoras of Melos, whose remarks are nothing short of unabashed derision. Surveying the agglomeration of votive panels left on site by grateful seafarers “whose vows had enabled them to escape the fury of the storm,” the first turns to the fifth-century sophist and poses a question. Does he not agree that “so many painted tablets” (*tot tabulis pictis*) demonstrate that the gods are not “careless of human affairs?” Diagoras replies with a quip wholly in keeping with his reputation for speaking offensively about religious practices. Considering the visual evidence, he contends that it is hard to say. After all, “there are no pictures [*picti*] anywhere of those who have been shipwrecked and have perished in the sea.”⁸² Writing at the turn of the second century CE, Juvenal sided with Cicero. Scrutinizing the testimony of “many a tablet” (*tabella plurima*) exhibited in our temples – these undoubtedly included marble relief as well as painted panels – he concluded caustically that “everyone” seems to believe they have survived a lightning strike!⁸³

The opposing views expressed by Cicero's interlocutors in *De natura deorum* – Diagoras's cynicism on the one hand and his companion's belief that they bear obvious witness to the willingness of the gods to extend aid to helpless victims caught in desperate situations on the other – characterize the tenor of discussions about putative miracles of intercession and the devotional behaviors attending them during the sixteenth century. Sounding like Franco Sacchetti, who derided the custom of leaving votives at sacred sites as *una idolatria* of the Christian faith, Desiderius Erasmus (1466/9–1563), who was among the most widely read of Renaissance Europe's authors, remarked on the practice with moralizing wit in *Praise of Folly* (1511) and, later, in several colloquies, including "The Shipwreck," published in 1523, and "A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake," published first in 1526. However, in the more than 130 years since Sacchetti mockingly told the story of a man who, in exchange for the return of his lost cat, vowed to honor Florence's Madonna of Orsanmichele with a wax image of the missing feline, times had changed.⁸⁴ Although charges of misplaced faith and calls for religious reform were not without precedent, they had become louder and, north of the Alps, were increasingly accompanied by exhortations to rid churches of a surfeit of images.

In 1517 Martin Luther's "Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences" was posted at Castle Church in Wittenberg, the site of one of the largest collections of relics in Europe. A new and forceful tide of iconoclasm washed over Germany and soon spread. On December 3, 1521, a mob inspired by the inflammatory rhetoric of Andreas Rudolff Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486–1541) – the following year he would declare, "I want and shall say to all pious Christians that all those who stand in awe before pictures have idols in their hearts" – forced its way into the church and wreaked havoc.⁸⁵ Luther was markedly less inflammatory. Still, in 1522 he delivered a sermon stating, "Whoever places an image in a church imagines he has performed a service to God, and done a good work, which is downright idolatry."⁸⁶ Creating a frame around cultic images that touted the miraculous and functioning as "secondary relics," votives were among the disparaged images. It was not simply representations of saints and acts of intercession that were under attack. Also impugned was belief in the efficacy of invocation and the veneration of saints that took place with and around images perceived, as Cavriolo stated in reference to *una effigie di Christo*, "particularly apt to heal all ills."

Regardless of the preciousness of material or the technical virtuosity of their facture, votives suggested to many that the distinction between the efficacy of faith and a faith in the efficacy of images had become blurred. Even before the voting members of the Council of Trent affirmed on December 4, 1563, the reform and doctrinal decrees that had been formulated and approved during the eighteen years of the council's duration, initiatives to restrain devotional practices that many felt smacked of superstition had been attempted. Too often

a cultic image was credited with demonstrating the active compassion of the living, reported to listen to the lonely, speak to the dispossessed, cry at human suffering, and respond to physical and verbal abuse. Even in the absence of accounts of such vivid exchanges, the very notion that a person on earth could in some way negotiate with saints residing in heaven – promising veneration in return for the receipt of grace – was to wrongly believe that humans could put God under obligation.⁸⁷ Participating in this system of reciprocity, votives, no less than the cultic images they surrounded, were inevitably entangled in the debate over idolatry.

Hard-line reformers were not alone in expressing condemnation. Moderates, including Erasmus, also censured the practices of invocation and veneration. However, in sharp contrast to Karlstadt, who fanned the flames of iconoclastic bonfires, Erasmus went on the offensive with a ridiculing pen in hand. “A Pilgrimage for Religion’s Sake” begins with a conversation between two neighbors. One, who has just returned from a pilgrimage to St. James of Compostella taken on behalf of his mother-in-law, who “had bound herself by a vow that if her daughter gave birth to a boy,” asks the other if he is aware of “a letter going round which the Virgin Mary wrote herself.”⁸⁸ Erasmus reveals the content of the letter after the following brief exchange, which not only identifies the missive’s purported author (Mary) but also suggests the physical nature of Marian presence (*lapis*, or stone).

MENEDEMUS: Which Mary?

OGYGIUS: The one called Mary a Lapide.

MENEDEMUS: At Basel, unless I’m mistaken.

OGYGIUS: Yes.

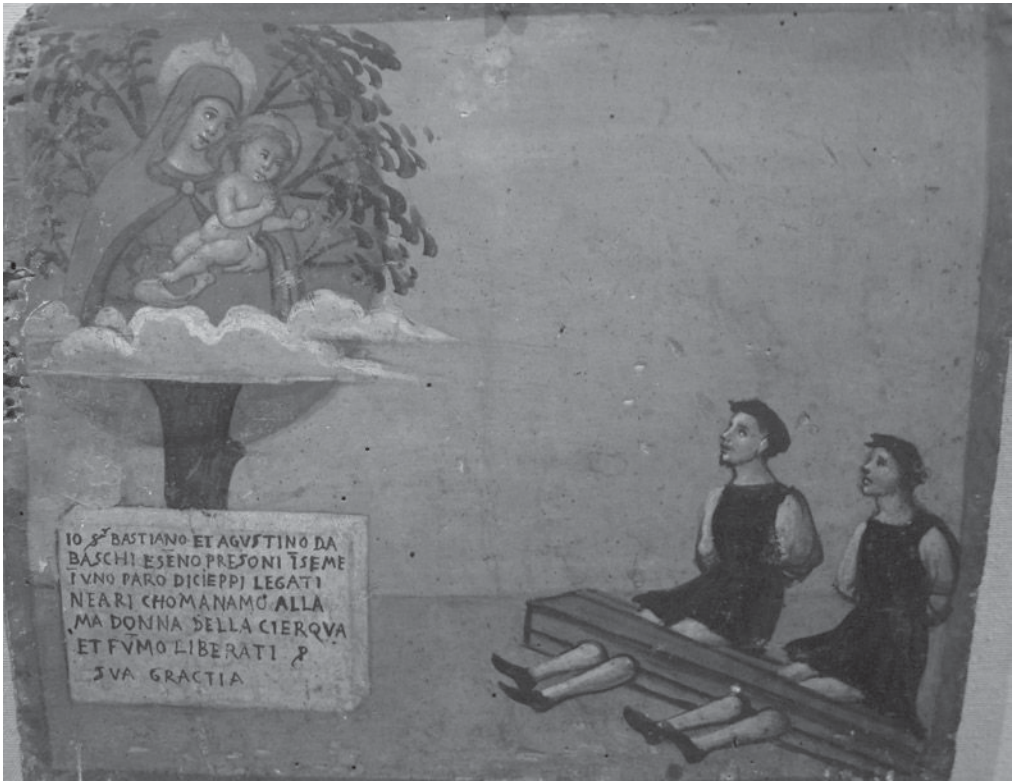
MENEDEMUS: Then it’s a stony saint [that is, a statue] you tell me of.

Written to Glaucoplutus, “a follower of Luther ... busily persuading people that the invocation of saints is useless,” who has been suggestively identified as Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), Mary relates the outrageous favors she is asked to bestow. A soldier “hired to butcher people, cries upon me, ‘Blessed Virgin, give me rich booty.’” A pregnant woman appeals for an easy delivery. A “doddering old man” seeks a return to youth. Prostitutes request rich customers to be sent their way, priests pray for lucrative benefices, and thieves ask for wealthy victims. Mary goes on to bemoan that if she fails to assist “those who are sailing, fighting, trading, dicing, marrying, [or] bearing children,” she is cursed. This, however, is nothing compared with “what I [now] endure.” Once, she laments, “I was hailed as ‘Queen of Heaven, mistress of the world’; now I hear scarcely an ‘Ave Maria.’” Worse, she says, are the efforts to expel her from the church and separate her from her Son. Finally, she sorrowfully regrets the removal from sacred sites of “whatever belongs to the saints.” These “belongings” included ex-votos.

“A Pilgrimage for Religion’s Sake” returns to a theme Erasmus had addressed more than a decade earlier in *Praise of Folly*. In a passage that seems a reprise of the conversation between Diagoras and his companion in Cicero’s *De natura deorum*, Folly ponders the worthiness of candidates for admission into “our fellowship” of the delusional. After considering “people who’ve adopted the foolish but pleasurable belief that if they see some carving or painting of ... Christopher they’re [convinced they are] not to die that day, or if anyone addresses a statue of Barbara in the set formula [believes] he’ll return unhurt from battle,” Folly turns to those who accept without question the “special powers” assigned to different saints; “one gives relief from toothache, another stands by women in childbirth, a third returns stolen objects,” and so forth. “What do men seek from these saints except what belongs to Folly? Amongst all the votive offerings you see covering the walls of certain churches right up to the roof, have you ever seen one put up for an escape from folly?”

The answer to Folly’s question depends wholly on the respondent. In *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, Paolo Morigia presents one causal cure and rescue after another. Giacomo Antonio Zucchini, entangled in the mechanisms of a mill and badly lacerated, made a vow to the Madonna and was saved (*fece voto alla Beata Vergine della Fontana di Caravaggio, & fu salvato*). The son of Francesco Meriso, having fallen from his horse, made a vow to the Madonna and was unhurt (*fece voto alla Beata Vergine, & fu liberato*), while the injured Ferramosca di Mandurina vowed to visit the site of the Marian apparition and, having done so, was healed (*fece voto di venire al luogo dell’apparizione, e subito fatto il voto fu sanito*).⁸⁹ Erasmus considered many of the very same circumstances occasioning the donation of ex-votos cited by Morigia, including thwarted attempts at execution. He, however, did so from a decidedly different perspective. Rather than accept a restoration of health or receipt of good fortune as de facto proofs of divine intervention, Erasmus makes it quite clear that the offerings covering church walls “right up to the roof” are sure signs of gullibility. Votives, he contends, are the possessions of Folly. To drive home the point, he cites with unconcealed scorn several examples of supposed acts of intercession.

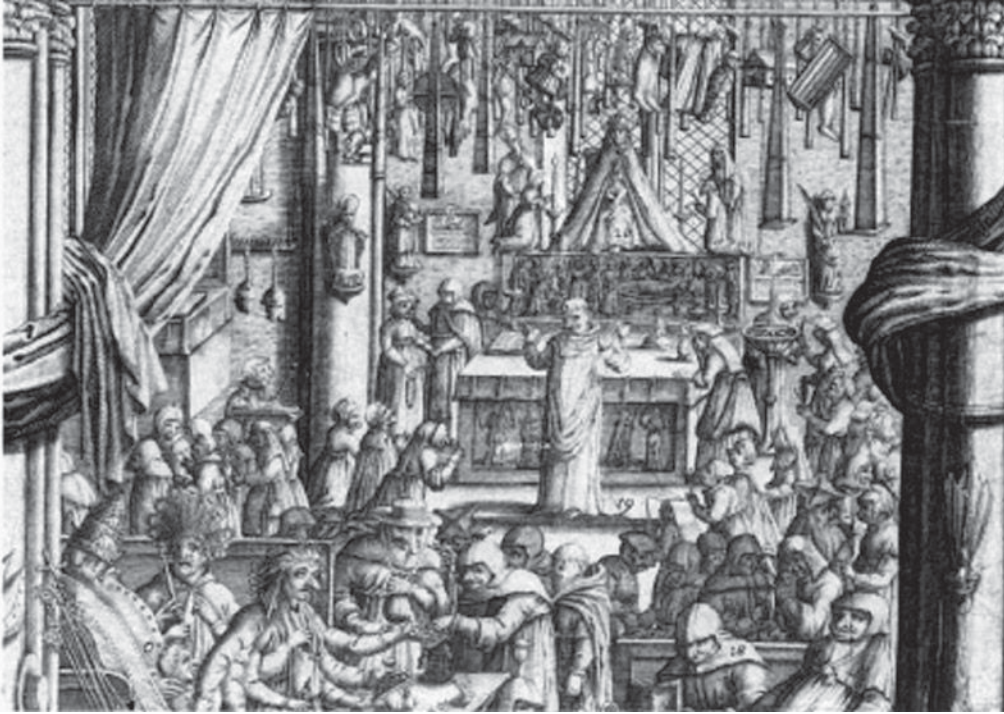
One man escaped drowning ... another boldly (and equally fortunately) fled from battle leaving his fellows to continue the fight. Another fell from the gallows ... and went on to relieve a good many people of the burden of wealth. This one broke out of prison, that one recovered from fever, to the annoyance of his doctors; yet another swallowed poison but it acted like a purge and did him good instead of killing him ... another upset his wagon ... another escaped with his life when his house collapsed, and another was caught in the act by a husband but got away.⁹⁰



24. Anonymous, Bastiano and Agostino da Baschi shackled, *tavoletta votiva*, early sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Viterbo, Il Museo degli Ex-voto, Sanctuary of the Madonna della Quercia (Photo: Gianfranco Ciprini)

Excepting, perhaps, an escape from a cuckolded husband, Erasmus's list of miracles can be readily matched with *tavolette*. The Viadana family, for example, offered a *tavoletta votiva* (Figure 9) to St. Nicholas of Tolentino in grateful acknowledgment of his assistance during an earthquake. Even though the family's home crumbled, everyone was saved. Although an escape from execution due to the breaking of the hanging rope or the swinging open of a prison door was often recognized by offering the frayed noose or broken lock, *tavolette* recording the event were also deposited at thaumaturgic sites. A panel offered to Viterbo's Madonna della Quercia by Bastiano and Agostino da Baschi is one such example (Figure 24). Having been found guilty of an offense and shackled in the stocks, the pair fortuitously and inexplicably found themselves delivered from their restraints. Perceiving their liberation to be a divine act, they duly honored their intercessor.

More than a century after Bastiano and Agostino da Baschi recognized the Madonna della Quercia's intervention in their miraculous liberation from the stocks and nearly as long after the publication of *Praise of Folly*, an



25. Monogramist DG, *Satire of the Catholic Church*, 1605, detail. Engraving. Nürnberg, Germanisches National Museum Kuperstichkabinett, Inv. Nr. HB 56, 1–3/1336. (Photo: Georg Janssen)

engraving pushed Erasmian moralizing mockery into the realm of biting parody. Comprising several sheets, *Satire of the Catholic Church* (1605) is a panorama of derision (Figure 25). Before a congregation of unsightly worshipers and repulsive figures aptly described as “hideous hybrid beasts,” priests perform a variety of rites and rituals. Above and around them is an excessive array of sacred images, reliquaries, and ex-votos “dangl[ing] like cured meats.” The profusion was intended to “vilify” the “mereness of Catholic ceremony.”⁹¹

The religious unrest that erupted in Northern Europe in the early decades of the sixteenth century did not hit Italy with anything close to the same intensity. Nevertheless, there was no shortage of charges of perversion, castigations of wayward thinking, and hence calls for reform south of the Alpine divide. Indeed, disparaging voices were heard before the sixteenth century, that of Fra Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98) being perhaps the most audible. Yet more than Northern Europe, Italy experienced what Hans Belting termed “the era of art,” which, according to Michael Camille, prompted viewers to “take all the emphasis from [the work’s] function and effect and put it instead on the producer.”⁹² As Alexander Nagel has recently demonstrated, many artists responded to the “complaints about the referential unreliability of images, their secularism, their frivolity, their tendency to indulge a taste for ‘curiosities,’”

and other grievances by taking up the challenge to reconcile “beautiful painting and religious piety” by various experimental means.⁹³ Patrons clearly played a part in all of this, as is made clear in recent studies on patronage and “market signaling” – and here we must include Nagel’s discussion of the frescoes painted for and in celebration of the Tornabuoni family in Santa Maria Novella, which placed private devotion on “quasi-theatrical” public view.⁹⁴ All of this is to say that the debate over images in Italy was focused principally on, but not restricted to, issues concerning the appropriateness of a representation to its subject *and* to its setting. Concern over the appearance and placement of artworks was tied, of course, to image use. Behaviors surrounding cultic images came under scrutiny by reformers both north and south of the Alps. Devotionalism, which can be understood as a blending of “popular piety with theological orthodoxy,” received its fair share of unfavorable attention.⁹⁵ A contemporary of Erasmus, the on-again, off-again Benedictine monk Teofilo Folengo was particularly caustic. Writing in macaronic verse under the name Merlino Cocajo, Folengo derided pilgrimage and votive donation in *Baldus* (first edition, 1517), a tale of the adventures of the thuggish knight Baldo.⁹⁶

Folengo’s ridicule was potentially more dangerous than that of Erasmus, for in addition to striking the faithful *vulgi* a mordant blow, he condemned the clergy unrepentantly. Digressing from the storyline to comment on indulgences and cultic images, Folengo describes a horde of pilgrims crowding around an altarpiece featuring the plague saints Anthony and Roch. Young and old, the assembled “are the possessed [*indiavolati*], ... the mute and the crippled of the world.” The brothers charged with demonstrating the miraculous nature of the site move through the throng of wailing and shoving supplicants two or three times each hour. With their eyes averted heavenward and feigning a pietistic disregard for the moneys they are raking in, they collect offerings. In this jumbled mass of humanity, the *frates* are not the only ones accumulating *dinari*. Hats and shoes vanish, and “more than once purses are lost or stolen.” Despite this show of unabashed greed – one cannot, Folengo writes, even imagine the satiating bounty of the meal the monks will later enjoy with the alms putatively yet sanctimoniously collected on behalf of the needy – the church is observed to be beautiful, and the signs of devotion plentiful. Votives, their purchase price going into the coffers of the clergy, are everywhere. Besides the piles of wax figures of heads, arms, legs, and livestock, “the soffits, walls, pilasters, and columns are covered by breastplates, helmets, statues, and painted panels [*pictisque tabellis*].”

Notably, this passage does not appear in later editions of *Baldus*. Having left the monastic life just before writing the adventures of Baldo, Folengo later sought a return. Satirizing devotional practices surrounding cultic images and condemning the venality of priests would not have helped his cause. Before the publication of its next edition in 1521, the offending passage was judiciously emended.

CHRONOLOGICAL PARAMETERS: CIRCA 1470, THE *TERMINUS A QUO*

The scholarly literature examining the aspersions and justifications that swirled around the use and alleged misuse of sacred images throughout the sixteenth century is vast and growing.⁹⁷ This book engages with this discussion, but it does so with a different focus and from a different, or expanded, perspective. Focus is shifted from the cultic image toward votive panel paintings. In other words, it moves from the center to the periphery: from the venerated representation to the *tavolette votive* that surrounded the cultic image and that referred back to it with a graphic catalog of miracles attesting divine *praesentia*. These illustrative pictures began to accumulate at thaumaturgic sites in the later fifteenth century, eighty some years before the Catholic prelates assembled at the Council of Trent issued a decree concerning the honoring of images. The Tridentine decree and the proposed reforms it spawned informed the decision to make circa 1610 the *terminus ad quem* of this book. The *terminus a quo* is less subjective. It is established by physical evidence. Although a panel dated 1432 that is now in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris (Plate 3) has been cited as marking the reemergence of pictures as votive offerings after a centuries long hiatus, paintings of the size and style that is typical of *tavolette votive* started to accumulate at shrines in the Marches, Emilia-Romagna, and Umbria decades later, in the 1470s, 1480s, and 1490s.

Classical texts testify to the presence of “painted tablets” at religious shrines; however, the votive form seems to have all but disappeared with the spread of Christianity. Associated with the pagan practices of offering *pinakes*, the donation of votive objects of all kinds was restricted by the Synod of Orleans in 533. Fifty-five years later, the Council of Auxerre, in 587, prohibited the practice altogether.⁹⁸ If the offering of votive pictures was affected by these interdictions, the embedded custom of requesting divine intervention and, upon its receipt, honoring one’s intercessor with a material expression of faith and gratitude was not. As decrees issued by the Council of Nantes in 660 and the Council of Lestines in 743 attest, the practice proved ineradicable. The faithful still traveled to sacred sites, offered prayers, performed a variety of rituals such as circumambulating the shrine three times, and left behind a miscellany of things: generic representations of themselves, a family member, a cow, horse, or other animal on which they depended, braids of hair, bits of clothing, crutches, anchors, coins, and casts of injured (or healed) body parts made of terracotta and, after the eleventh century, similarly shaped *immagini* made of wax pressed into reusable molds. There is some, albeit scant, evidence that painted panels were among the objects found in votive deposits in the Christian East, yet there is nothing that I know of that suggests their currency among pilgrims to thaumaturgic sites in the West.⁹⁹ Then, for reasons yet to be explained, a Ferrarese nun named Sara gratefully acknowledged in 1432 God’s assistance

with a panel painted in tempera that explained visually and verbally the joyful resolution of a dire situation.¹⁰⁰

Although the panel, which is attributed to Antonio Orsini and precisely dated October 14, 1432, is, at 43 by 74 centimeters, roughly four times the size of later *tavolette* as well as more masterfully painted, it has been cited as marking the return of a votive form that would gain increasing popularity during the course of the next two centuries.¹⁰¹ Dedicatory inscriptions that spread across the picture plane on unfurled banderoles elucidate the scene, which depicts, on the left, Suor Sara kneeling before St. Francis in ecstasy and, on the right, two embracing knights, who are identified by inscription and heraldic insignia as Juan da Valenza and Juan da Casteldosso. When Juan da Casteldosso's slave was murdered, a feud of honor erupted between the two Spanish noblemen. With bloodshed imminent, Suor Sara turned to St. Francis for help, asking him to restore peace and prevent senseless carnage. As the inscriptions state and the imagery implies, Sara's prayers were answered. Heavenly light shines down upon the antagonists, while above the prayerful nun, Christ crucified, swathed in seraphic wings, bestows on Francis the ultimate signs of his sanctity: the stigmata. The presence of the divine on earth is thus doubly asserted. Heavenly grace literally touches Francis. He, in turn and by right of his status as one of God's chosen agents, extends it to Suor Sara. The efficacy of faith and intercession is thereby affirmed.

Decades would pass before votives bearing a degree of resemblance to Suor Sara's panel with its explicitly stated function began to appear with regularity. Indeed, *tavolette votive* seem to have remained scarce before the final decades of the fifteenth century. Both visual and textual evidence indicate just how rare they were at the time. The lower right vignette of the *St. Margaret of Antioch Altarpiece*, circa 1400 (Plate 2), which depicts pilgrims gathered around the saint's tomb, indicates the popular use of *immagini*. Cast wax heads, hands, feet, breasts, and legs hang from a tying rod, but there is no painted panel perched against Margaret's sepulcher. In light of the date of 1432 on Suor Sara's panel, this is unremarkable. More noteworthy is their absence from the more varied collection of votive offerings – including models of ships – pictured in Vittore Carpaccio's *Apparition of the Ten Thousand Martyrs*, circa 1512¹⁰² (Figures 26 and 27). In little more than a decade, a *tavoletta* would appear as a votive counterpart to a cast head. Both are depicted in the lower right corner of the broadsheet celebrating St. Roch that was printed in Venice to raise funds for the Scuola di San Rocco (Figure 40). Material evidence indicates that by this date *tavolette* were, at least at some sites, beginning to amass. Interestingly, the earliest panels – like that offered by Suor Sara – have ties to Ferrara.

Leandro Novelli first observed stylistic similarities between some of the panels dedicated to Cesena's Madonna del Monte and the frescoes attributed to Francesco del Cossa (ca. 1430–ca. 1477) in the Sala dei Mesi in Ferrara's



26. Votive model ships, seventeenth century. Sant'Anastasia (Naples): Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco. (Photo: author)



27. Vittore Carpaccio, *Apparition of the Ten Thousand Martyrs*, circa 1512. Venice, Accademia. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York)



28. Francesco del Cossa, *Month of April*, 1469–70, detail. Ferrara, Sala dei Mesi, Palazzo Schifanoia. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York)

Palazzo Schifanoia, 1469–70.¹⁰³ He pointed specifically to the undeniable physiognomic likeness of the votary in a *tavoletta* featuring St. Sebastian (Plate 4) and several of the ladies of Ferrara’s court depicted in the fresco of April (Figure 28). In fact, the Cesena panel seems to bear the impress of Cossa’s accomplished hand – or an artist very close to him – beyond this singular detail. Cossa’s style, most notably his delicate fluidity of line, stands apart from that of Cosimo Tura and his followers. More lyrical than angular, it has been described as a “fusion of classic and late Gothic elements pervaded with a fresh naturalism.”¹⁰⁴ These qualities are present in the Cesena panel; in the tapering of fingers, the slight upturn of Sebastian’s head inclined toward the Madonna, the arced sweep of the saint’s partially transparent loincloth, the delicate rose tint to his cheeks, and especially in the background. The suggestively sketched range of tree-studded mountains seems to float in the outlying atmosphere of the distant horizon. If the style of this and several other examples of *tavolette* at Cesena indicates a turn by votaries toward painted votive offerings in the 1470s and 1480s, the popularity of the votive form appears more generally to

have been limited. The number of extant fifteenth-century *tavolette* is fairly small, and references to them in roughly contemporaneous inventory records and *libri dei miracoli* are few.

Two miracle books, the *Miracoli et gratie della gloriosa Madre Vergine Maria delle Charcere di Prato*, which recounts 180 miracles and dates to the mid-1480s, and the *Libro dei miracoli della Madonna di Tirano*, which spans the years from 1504 to 1519 and records seventy-four miraculous occurrences as having taken place on ground made holy by an apparition of the Virgin, can be taken as representative of the form's decided lack of widespread use at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Among the donations left by those who were restored to health, escaped the hangman's rope, were exorcised of demons, attended in childbirth, and, in a notable number of cases, the parents of briefly resuscitated stillborn infants were a pair of discarded crutches, an ox, a pig, a representation in silver of a baby, a silver plaque bearing the Madonna's image, gold coins, a chalice, countless candles of white and yellow wax, and a painting (*dipinto*) honoring the glory of the Virgin. Only a single devotee of each Madonna, one associated with a shrine in Tuscany, the other with a site in the Alto Adige, is reported as offering a *tavoletta*. Pinned beneath the wheel of a mill, Antonio di Giovanni of Florence had made a vow to the Madonna delle Carceri. Having survived the ordeal, he made a pilgrimage to Prato to donate a candle and *una tavolecta dipincta*.¹⁰⁵ The *tavorela* offered to the Madonna of Tirano by Venturino di Valtrompia can be taken less certainly as a reference to a painted votive panel. The term *tavorela* might indicate a painting larger than was the norm for a sixteenth-century votive panel. However, the fact that it was given *in memoria* of a *grande miraculo*, which is specified as the survival of a skull-fracturing head wound, suggests the picture was a *tavoletta*.¹⁰⁶

Shrine inventories from the middle decades of the sixteenth century tell similar stories. While votive assemblages remained varied, certain forms and mediums predominated over others at particular sites. The 1554 inventory of ex-votos left at the Brescian Sanctuary that safeguarded the fresco of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, for example, listed no fewer than 586 *occhii d'argento* (eyes cast in silver).¹⁰⁷ At this site, objects crafted of silver – their weights and hence their monetary value assiduously noted – were the preferred form of *voto*. By the century's end, however, *tavolette* had assumed a conspicuous place at thau-maturgic sites throughout the Italian Peninsula.

This prompts the question, Why do *tavolette* reappear in the fifteenth century and then steadily gain widespread popularity during the sixteenth century? It is a question that has received little, if any, consideration. It is also one that cannot, it seems, be answered unequivocally. There was certainly nothing new about the beliefs and attendant practices associated with votive donation, which, as any number of sixteenth-century writers including Athansio Nelli convey, was “practiced by all sorts of ordinary [as well as] great individuals.”¹⁰⁸ What Richard

Goldthwaite called “the laicization of religion,” a desire by the laity to “participate more directly in the sacred life that ... had been the preserve of the priestly caste” and the response to that desire – including the “inspiring and directing [of] new forms of [popular] piety” – had been evolving since the eleventh century.¹⁰⁹ Concurrently, devotion to the Virgin Mary, who Bernardino da Busto characterized in the first sermon of his *Mariale* as “the mediator of our intercession, for she intercedes daily for us” and to whom approximately 90 percent of *tavolette votive* are dedicated, was on the rise across Europe.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the doctrine of Purgatory, which in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries “democratized” a penitential system offering for the first time “a full assurance of salvation to illiterate men,” had helped to secure Mary’s role as humanity’s *Avvocata*.¹¹¹

As an intermediary or “third” and “infernal” place “in which souls find themselves between physical death and the Last Judgment,” Purgatory had been conceived by the church fathers between the second and fourth centuries.¹¹² By the sixteenth century, the concept had been institutionalized, first by pontifical definition in 1254, second by the assembly of prelates at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, and then by the convocation of theologians at Florence in 1438–39. Revisiting the issue at its twenty-fifth and final gathering in 1563, the Council of Trent issued its formal decree. Immediately preceding the council’s stated position on the invocation of saints and the veneration of images, it confirmed the potential for actions and “the suffrages of the living, that is the sacrifice of the mass, prayers, alms and other works of piety,” to mitigate a purgatorial stay.¹¹³ The popular appreciation of Mary as the great *Mediatrix* cannot be separated from the remarkable rise in Marian shrines. By the mid-sixteenth century, the province of Brescia alone had more than 115 sites dedicated to the Queen of Heaven. The number is, perhaps, unsurprising for, as the charismatic Bernardino of Siena had preached, an appeal to the Madonna “was worth more than the pleas to all the martyrs, angels and saints.” Neither Mary’s popular appeal nor the multiplication of Marian sanctuaries should be divorced from the concept of *purgatorium*.¹¹⁴

Written between 1063 and 1072, Peter Damian of Ravenna’s *De diversis apparitionibus et miraculis* attests to the special connection between sinners suffering purgatorial punishments (*poenam purgatorii*) and the Virgin. The text records two incidents. The first recounts the repercussions of an unheeded warning. During the night of the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, a woman received a visit from her godmother who had died a year earlier. The specter informed her goddaughter that the “Queen of the World” had released her from the torments of the “place of punishment” (*loca poenalia*). Her salvation was not singular. The Madonna also liberated a “multitude greater than Rome.” The godmother’s announcement was accompanied by an admonition: lead a good and cautious life. Sadly, the advice fell on deaf ears. One year later to the day, the goddaughter became gravely ill and died. “The moral of

the story, as frightening as it is,” says Peter Damian, “is this: for the sin she had forgotten this woman was tortured until the immaculate Mother of God intervened on her behalf.”¹¹⁵

The similarly didactic second story verbalized what became a critical component of Marian devotionism: the exchange of devotion for a liberation from suffering. Summoned from his slumber by his deceased godfather, a priest witnessed what can best be described as a visionary drama. Enthroned and accompanied by several saints, the Holy Virgin Mary listens to the beseeching prayers of a desperate and prostrate woman. In her distress the woman implores the Virgin to intercede with the Trinity on her behalf in order to obtain the release of a man from eternal torment. After considering the evidence, the Queen of Heaven concedes that although “crushed by a great weight of crimes,” the suffering man did in fact demonstrate “two good points” during his life on earth. First, he performed charitable acts. Second, “he often carried oil and kindling ... for the lights of my Church” (Santa Maria Maggiore).¹¹⁶ It is the second act in the second story that speaks to the transactional bargaining and proffering of material goods endemic to Marian devotionism and votive donation. In this case, grace was obtained because oil and kindling had been offered. *Tavolette*, candles, wax and metal *immagini*, and other votive objects left at shrines *per grazia ricevuta* assumed something of a related function. In their essence, and not to be confused with objects offered in anticipation of the receipt of grace (*pro remedio animae*), they were humble payments after the fact, public acknowledgments that Mary or another saint had heeded a call for help and taken action to rectify the situation.

By the advent of the fifteenth century, three factors fueling devotionism were thus securely in place: the “laicization of religion,” the “democratization” of the penitential system, and the unique accessibility of Mary – she was everywhere “her image was being worshipped.”¹¹⁷ In this cultural climate, a new, conscious sense of self found expression in devotional objects, especially those affording a donor the possibility of conveying clearly and publicly his or her individual, familial, communal, and even professional identity. Those at the upper end of the socioeconomic scale had long enjoyed this privilege. Around 1375, for example, Giusto de’ Menabuoi (ca. 1320–91) painted a fresco of the enthroned Madonna and Child in the baptistery of Padua. Although flanked by six saints evenly distributed on either side of the throne, the Virgin and Infant Christ direct their gazes and gestures to their right where Fina Buzzacarini, wife of Francesco da Carrara and Giusto’s patron, is prominently pictured kneeling in prayer. During the fifteenth century, the presence of pietistic patrons like Fina Buzzacarini became more conspicuous. Spurred on by a diffused “secular theory of virtuous possession that could answer traditional theological teachings of the virtues of poverty” and desirous of establishing their social status and Christian character within the community, the elite

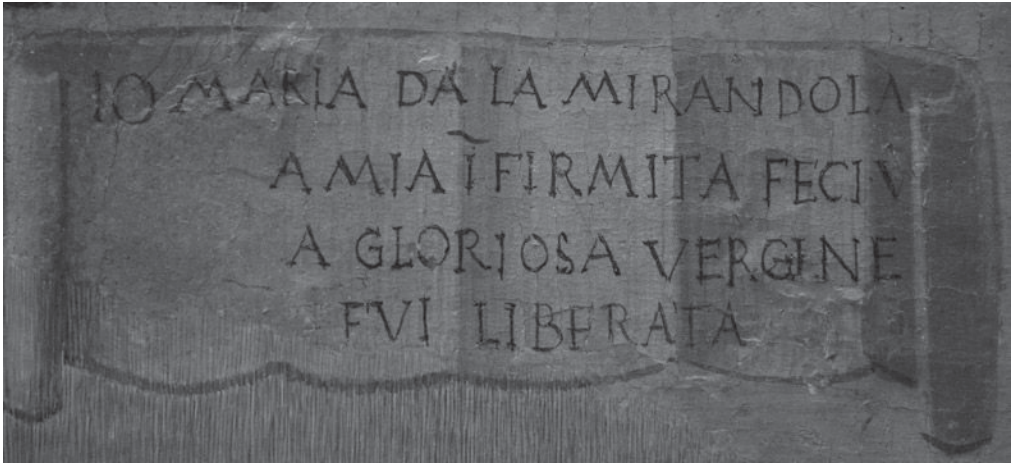


29. Domenico Ghirlandaio, Sassetti Chapel, Santa Trinita, Florence, 1483–86. (Photo: Alinari/ Art Resource, New York)

endowed churches, chapels, and a proliferating assortment of charitable institutions, such as orphanages and hospitals.¹¹⁸

Endowing a chapel was a signaling act of piety that additionally afforded patrons the opportunity to visually present themselves to the community at large. As Giovanni Ruccellai famously stated in a memorandum to his heirs, the resultant structures and the images that filled them served “the glory of God, the honor of the city, and the commemoration of myself.”¹¹⁹ The three tiers of frescoes on the altar wall of the Sassetti Chapel in Santa Trinita, begun in 1479 by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–94) and completed six years later, illustrate the point (Figure 29). On the lowest level, Francesco Sassetti and his wife Nera Corsi are represented in profile on either side of Ghirlandaio’s altarpiece, *Nativity and Adoration of the Shepherds*. Above them, two scenes reference the legend of Sassetti’s patron saint, Francis: *Confirmation of the Franciscan Rule by Pope Honorius III* is beneath the chapel vault, and under it *The Miracle of the Resuscitation of the Notary’s Son* fills the intermediary space. Folding the past (the historical occurrence of the depicted event) into the present moment of their rendering (the 1480s), Ghirlandaio included contemporaneous Florentines among the *testimoni di veduta*. Friends and family members witness moments of religious import, including a miraculous act of intercession: a resuscitation of the dead. As Patricia Rubin observed, this “mix of sacred and civic history, hagiography and family chronicle” is “particular to ... the specific interests of the patron.” It reflects his fashioning of self.¹²⁰ Here, Sassetti had himself publicly portrayed as socially well connected and, more germane to the space, as a man infused with dignified piety in the presence of God and his saint.

On a significantly reduced scale matched by modest compositions resolutely focused on personal experience, *tavolette votive* extended aspects of this opportunity to those of lesser financial means. Like Ghirlandaio’s fresco cycle in the Sassetti Chapel and similarly grand projects, such as Filippino Lippi’s altarpiece for the Carafa Chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome, begun in 1489, and even more pointedly Mantegna’s *Madonna della Vittoria* (Figure 1), which was conceived as an ex-voto, *tavolette* performed three distinct functions: first, they represented their donors; second, they were displayed in sacred settings of communal gathering; and, third, they directed self-referential messages to shrine visitors as well as to an omniscient God.¹²¹ On the one hand, visual self-referencing parallels the dialogic conventions of penitential prayer, specifically the language of direct address conveyed by the use of the familiar “you” (*tu*). On the other hand, self-referencing points to a donor’s desire to publicly declare his or her identity. One of the more popular forms of votive panel inscription begins with “I”: “Io, Maria de la Mirandola ...” (Figure 30); “Io, f.te Giordano da Napoli ...”; “Io, Zuane ... de Maistro Francescho Marescalco ...”; and so on.¹²²



30. Detail of an inscription, *tavoletta votiva* offered by Maria della Mirandola to the Madonna del Monte, late fifteenth to early sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Cesena, Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte. (Photo: author)

Arguably, these pronouncements of identity on panels clustered around cultic images can be compared to the civic and familial coats of arms suspended from baldachins held over the host during Corpus Christi processions. In both cases, and by reason of their nearness to the holy object, the host in one instance and the relic or representation of a saint in the other, coats of arms and ex-votos shared in the sacrality of the holy objects they framed.¹²³ Moreover and importantly, they did so in plain view of a wide and diverse group of spectators. There is, of course, a marked difference between the two. The exhibition of coats of arms was a privilege restricted by class; depositing *tavolette* was not. There is yet another distinction between these two publicly displayed objects. The size and style of votive panel paintings lay stress on the humility of the donors they reference. It is hard to argue a parallel case for the heraldic devices of a noble family ceremoniously hung above the host during Corpus Christi processions. Moreover, the humbleness of style that is so evident in *tavolette votive* was wholly in keeping with the thaumaturgic images they framed. Although often enshrined in elaborately ornamented structures, miracle-working images were made typically of modest materials carved or painted without virtuosic pretension.¹²⁴

As this suggests, it would be an oversight with deceptive consequences to ignore the public visibility of *tavolette votive* simply because of the anonymity of their painters and, in a majority of cases, the obscurity of their donors, or because of their material and stylistic humbleness. When reflecting on this issue, it is wise to heed some advice offered by Federico Zeri. "The history of Italian art cannot be understood if one eliminates what was seen by at



31. Anonymous, *tavoletta votiva* offered by Felipo Campese and his wife, June 3, 1491. Tempera on panel. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: with kind permission of Santa Maria dei Miracoli)

least three-quarters of the population.”¹²⁵ The votive images and objects that filled thaumaturgic shrines were visible to all. This is not to deny the readily apparent differences between the large, costly altarpieces and the small, inexpensive votive pictures that existed together within these sacred sites. It is to acknowledge their similarities. In obvious ways, Mantegna’s monumental *Madonna della Vittoria* with its masterful portrait of Francesco II Gonzaga stands at a significant distance from the typical renderings of donors seen on *tavolette*. The latter are, with extremely few exceptions, more reductive than detailed in their description of a donor’s physiognomic features. Moreover, they were not intended to carry meaning beyond their votive function, as was the case with the politically charged *Madonna della Vittoria*. But the personalized relationship between donor and holy person conveyed in paintings such as *Madonna della Vittoria* is not unlike that seen in *tavolette*. Some of the earliest surviving *tavolette* point to this most clearly because, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the intercessor had yet to be uniformly elevated to a distant penumbra tucked into one of the composition’s upper corners. In a notable number of cases, the Madonna is pictured solidly situated on earth. The 1499 panel from Lonigo cited in the introductory chapter depicts her seated among the

flowers and grasses (Figure 2). Another *tavoletta* at this site dated 1491 shows a more regal but no less grounded Madonna (Figure 31). Her devotees, Felipo Campese and his wife, stand to her right and left. With the subtle precision of a few well-placed lines, the painter has conveyed their humility. In contrast to the Madonna dei Miracoli, seated upright, crowned, and looking straight ahead, Felipo and his wife incline their heads ever so slightly, humbly casting their gazes down toward Mary's right hand resting in her lap. A third example in this collection places the Madonna dei Miracoli in a single-setting, double-time narrative that unfolds on a city street (Plate 5).¹²⁶ Crowned or not, the depictions of Mary in these and similar Lonigo panels stress Mary's accessibility as the *Madonna humilitatis*.

The portrayal of the Virgin in late fifteenth-century *tavolette* at Cesena's Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte tend to cast her in a different role. Although earth-bound, she is presented as the *Regina Coeli*. Using compositional and iconographical strategies familiar from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century altarpieces by Spinello Aretino, Paolo di Giovanni Fei, Lippo Memmi, and others, the painters of these panels positioned Mary on a throne that is either architectonic in structure or set against a cloth of honor signifying her majestic status. Additionally, and with only two exceptions, the donor appears reduced in scale. One or two attendant saints also are present, creating something akin to a *sacra conversazione* (Figure 32). Style, too, distinguishes the earliest panels at Cesena from those at Lonigo. Gradations of color and shadows predominate over a dependency on thick black line, imparting a sense of volume to forms, and while votaries are usually shown in rigid profile, other figures are enlivened in several cases by a graceful contrapposto. Settings exhibit a similar deftness in handling. Blue skies lighten to near white as they approach the line of the horizon. Clouds, rendered with mellifluous swirls of white line offset against grayish-blue patches of pigment, seem to scuttle in the distant heavens. The differences between the Cesena and Lonigo *tavolette* cannot be explained with certainty. It can be proposed, however, that rather than obtain a work from a local *bottega* or from a vendor at a seasonal fair, the donors of the Cesena panels turned to more established artists.¹²⁷ This is exactly what Tommaso "Fedra" Inghirami did when, in 1508, he commissioned a painter well versed in Raphael's style to make his *tavoletta* (Figure 13).

Stylistic differences aside, *tavolette* began to proliferate around 1470, a time that coincides with an increase in portrait paintings and ever more monumental fresco cycles featuring a donor, his family, and even his well-placed friends. In view of the fact that among popular votives *tavolette* uniquely provided votaries of even minimal means with an opportunity to personalize their expressions of gratitude, this is perhaps not surprising. As pictures, votive panel paintings allowed the pious to place themselves in the exalted company of Mary and the saints. This weighed heavily in favor of choosing to honor one's



32. Anonymous, votary with St. Sebastian, *tavoleta votiva*, late fifteenth century. Tempera on panel. Cesena, Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte. (Photo: author)

intercessor with a painting rather than a wax cast or only a candle or alms. Demonstrable piety signaled social respectability. It conferred public prestige on the actant.¹²⁸ The social elite already recognized the potential of artworks to convey this to the broader community. Now, those at the lower end of the social spectrum could follow suit. Within this environment, *tavolette* began to cover sanctuary walls.

CHRONOLOGICAL PARAMETERS: CIRCA 1610, A *TERMINUS AD QUEM*

If the *terminus a quo* for a study of *tavolette votive* can be set around 1470 on the basis of extant panels, then the *terminus ad quem* can be reasonably, if somewhat arbitrarily, placed roughly within the first decade of the seventeenth century. Like the beginning point of this study, the end date calls for an explanation; indeed, it requires justification. As is the case with the former, the latter largely reflects physical evidence. Without question, *tavolette votive* acquired increasing popularity during the sixteenth century. Among the surviving examples, those that are securely dated by inscription were produced principally during the second half of the cinquecento. Because *tavolette* were made mainly in *botteghe*, dated panels facilitate the dating of others through stylistic comparison. While compositions tend to be formulaic, distinctive definitions of interior space, the rendering of eyes, and other features aid in this endeavor. The 1499 panel at Lonigo (Figure 2) is a case in point. A similar reliance on heavy black line, which was used to delineate the Madonna dei Miracoli's long fingers and wide eyes, as well as Mary's unusual squat position, suggests the same painter was responsible for an undated *tavoletta* in which the Virgin is compositionally balanced by a bed-ridden youth. Yet such obvious stylistic similarities are not always present. In the absence of documentation solidly provided by a dedicatory inscription or more loosely implied by matching a painted scene of rescue to an entry in a shrine's miracle book, assured dating is impossible. Distinguishing a *tavoletta* made in 1590 from one that was made fifteen or twenty years earlier or later falls into the realm of guesswork. This not only leaves a large corpus of works in the ambiguous category of "seems like" and "appears to be" but, if that were the sole determinate, makes it rather tricky to establish a concluding date for this study. Consequently, I have turned to key texts for help, including the remarkable *libro dei miracoli* of the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco, a manuscript dated by two dedications to February 20, 1608.

Apart from the moralizing and derisive descriptions provided by Erasmus, Folengo, and others, Fra Arcangelo Domenici, the author of the *Compendio dell'istoria, miracoli e gratie della Madonna Santissima dell'Arco*, provides the richest – and, it should be said, favorably eyewitnessed – account of a votive panel's donation. Also, and of relevance to the *terminus ad quem* proposed here, Fra Arcangelo's *Compendio* follows by one year the published proceedings of the

provincial Council of Malines, which commented on popular pietistic practices that came uncomfortably close to superstitious acts. It also succeeds Pope Clement VIII's (pontificate 1592–1605) creation in 1602 of the *Congregazione dei Beati* and the contemporaneous publication of Cesare Baronio's magisterial, twelve-volume Catholic reply to the Protestant *Magdeburg Centuries*, 1562–74: the *Annales Ecclesiastici*, 1588–1607. While the *Congregazione* endeavored to exert papal control of localized cults, the *Annales Ecclesiastici* painstakingly demonstrated the continuity of the apostolic origins and, hence, universal and atemporal authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The Council of Malines was but one of several regional councils that convened in the wake of the conclusion of the Council of Trent in 1563 with the objective of interpreting and implementing Tridentine decrees and invested with the task of sustaining the authority asserted through the chronology presented in the *Annales Ecclesiastici*. This included matters pertaining to the use of images.

The Council of Trent met in twenty-five assemblies (or nine sessions) spanning eighteen years. With papal legates presiding, it convened first between 1545 and 1547 at the behest of Pope Paul III (pontificate 1534–49). Catholic bishops gathered again in 1551–52, while Julius III occupied the *sedes apostolica*. The third and final assembly, 1562–63, occurred under the pontificate of Pius IV (1559–65). Intent on countering Protestant challenges to Catholic doctrine, the prelates placed reform of the episcopacy and pastorate high on the agenda. Issues having to do with sacred images were an afterthought. As the document concerning relics, images, and the invocation and veneration of saints was received only on the last working day of the council, December 2, these topics were afforded virtually no time for discussion.¹²⁹ On the afternoon of December 4, the 235 voting members of the council approved the five reform decrees hammered out in the previous weeks. Then, having listened to a reading of the doctrinal decrees that had been formulated since 1545, the council confirmed those as well.

The council's composition helps explain the lack of attention paid to devotional activities centered on the use of images. While attendance was highest for the third assembly, most of those present came from countries virtually untouched by outbreaks of iconoclasm. It was only with the arrival in Trent of the French delegation on November 13, 1562, that the issue was raised (but not pursued), for the French, in contrast to the much larger Italian and Spanish contingents, were attempting to deal with the Calvinist assault on images. The French voice is the one that informed the prescription "On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images."¹³⁰

The promulgated decree is not long. It deserves quoting, at least in part.

The holy council charges all bishops and others with the office and responsibility of teaching, according to the practice of the catholic and

apostolic church received from the earliest times ... [that] they are first of all to instruct the faithful carefully about the intercession of the saints, invocation of them, reverence for their relics and legitimate use of images of them.... And they must also teach that images of Christ, the Virgin Mother of God, and the other saints should be set up and kept, particularly in churches, and that due honor and reverence [*honorem et venerationem*] is owed to them, not because some divinity or power is believed to lie in them as reason for the cult, or because anything is to be expected of them, or because confidence should be placed in images as was done by the pagans of old; but because the honor showed to them is referred to the original which they represent: thus, through the images which we kiss and before which we uncover our heads and go down on our knees, we give adoration to Christ and veneration to the saints, whose likeness they bear. And this has been approved by the decrees of councils, especially the second council of Nicaea [787, which quotes St. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*], against the iconoclasts....

[Several sentences follow in which images are justified on the grounds that they “put before the eyes of the faithful” in instructive and inspirational ways “the miracles of God.”]

The holy council earnestly desires to root out utterly any abuses that may have crept into these holy and saving practices, so that no representations of false doctrine should be set up which give occasion of dangerous error to the unlettered.... All superstition must be removed from invocation of saints, veneration of relics and use of sacred images [*omnis porro superstitio in sanctorum invocatione, reliquiarum veneratione et imaginum sacro usu tollatur*]; all aiming at base profit must be eliminated; all sensual appeal [*lascivia*] must be avoided.... And lastly, bishops should give great care and attention to ensure that in this matter nothing occurs that is disorderly, ... nothing profane and nothing unseemly, since holiness befits the house of God.¹³¹

During the decades following Trent’s formal acceptance of proposals on December 3 and 4, 1563, and their confirmation by Pope Pius IV on January 26, 1564, a series of provincial councils convened at Cambrai (Concilium Cameracenes, 1565), Milan (Conciliorum Mediolanense I–IV, 1565–76), Malines (Conciliorum Mechliniense, 1607), and elsewhere throughout the Catholic world. Their objective was to clarify Tridentine policy, but regional councils necessarily took into consideration local interests as is apparent, for example, in the published proceedings issued by the Council of Mexico in 1585.¹³² *Tridentinismo*, or the interpretation and implementation of Tridentine decrees by regional councils, inevitably reflected diverse popular, cultural, and political concerns on multiple levels. Much was at stake: institutional prestige (secular as well as sacred), communal identity, and economic gain.¹³³ Additionally, and because Trent had supplied scant specifics regarding religious images, a host of writers, including ecclesiastics who had been at Trent and practicing artists

who had not, put pen to paper with the intent of verbalizing what had been left unsaid.

The council's end witnessed the beginning of a "veritable explosion" of published treatises and unpublished tracts on the subject of reform.¹³⁴ Johannes Molanus's *De Picturis et Imaginibus Sacris*, published first in Louvain in 1570 and then in a significantly expanded edition in 1594, and Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* of 1582, which twelve years later was published in Ingolstadt in Latin, thereby increasing its accessibility throughout the Catholic world, are among the texts that grappled with issues concerning the appropriate appearance (decorum) and "legitimate" use of artworks. Both Molanus (1533–85), a professor of theology at Louvain, and Paleotti, who became archbishop of Bologna after Trent, state outright their goal of addressing the abuses noted by the council. The table of contents of Paleotti's *Discorso* cites *voti* as the topic of book V, [chapter 5](#). Unfortunately, that section of the text was never written. The highly prescriptive *Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae*, 1577, of Charles Borromeo (1538–84) also belongs within the collection of elucidating texts. The *Instructiones*, which includes a brief comment on votive offerings, cannot be divorced from the Council of Milan. Borromeo, who was passionate in the search for his own salvation and exacting in his call for piety among others, had, as Milan's archbishop, presided over the regional council that had concluded its fourth assembly the previous year.¹³⁵ The council's *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* contains the first reprint of Borromeo's *Instructiones*. Like Molanus's *De Picturis* and Paleotti's *Discorso*, Borromeo's *Instructiones* went into multiple reprintings: Venice in 1595, Milan again in 1599, Brescia in 1603, Paris in 1643, and more.

Considered as a group, these conciliar decrees and explicating texts do what Trent did not. In evaluating claims of devotional efficacy – the "invocation of saints, veneration of relics and use of sacred images" – and in determining which practices evinced abuses of "false doctrine ... giv[ing] occasion of dangerous error to the unlettered," they deliberate the proper role of images in devotional practice. Molanus was inclined to be tolerant. He maintained that images inspiring popular devotion were of value regardless of whether or not they reflected historical truth.¹³⁶ Otherwise inclined, Borromeo warned that sacred images must conform to scriptural truth, traditions, and ecclesiastical histories. Nothing, he said, "that is uncertain, apocryphal [or] superstitious" should be painted. He applied the proscription to votive tablets as well as to altarpieces.

Concerning votive tablets [*tabulae votarum*], offerings, images of melted wax, and other things of this sort, which, according to ancient practice and tradition, are usually suspended in churches in commemoration of health recovered, of danger avoided, of grace received from Divine and

miraculous assistance, since they are unnaturally, indecorously, indecently and superstitiously represented [*cum saepe falso, indecore, turpiter, superstitioseque effingantur*], ... caution should be exercised in depicting them.¹³⁷

References to superstition in Tridentine and subsequent conciliar decrees, as well as in Borromeo's *Instructiones*, Paleotti's *Discorso*, and other tracts indicate that the debate swirling around images was concerned with what they purportedly attested. The lived experiences depicted on *tavolette* – the assault by bandits, a difficult pregnancy, falls from a tree, or a tumble down a flight of stairs – were *not* the problem. These pictured occurrences were verifiable as factual events. Concern seems to have centered on two things: the *interpretation* of the event (Did it evince a miracle?); and the implications of the presentation of these pictures in association with sacred images. Visualized in conjunction with a dialogue of devotion between supplicant and solicited saint, these scenes of rescue and recovery suggested a causal link between a confronted crisis and its resolution: a prayer was said, a fever broke, or some disaster was averted. That sixteenth-century miracle books alternately describe a *tavoletta* as a “narrative of what happened [*dal fatto*]” or as a “narrative of a miracle [*miracolo*]” indicates just how fine the line was when it came to interpreting a cure or a rescue. Was the incident an event that could be explained by natural causes or was it an occurrence that should be credited to supernatural forces? Given heightened efforts by the Catholic Church to review for authenticity all claims of miracles, it is not surprising that popular attestations caused some apprehension. Further complicating matters was the placement of these public testaments of divine intervention in and around transfigured images, representations of Christ, the Madonna, and saints that reportedly became animate: crying, bruising, moving, sweating, and speaking. Displayed leaning against, hanging above, and covering the walls around a venerated image, *tavolette* might imply to the unlettered, it was feared, that the representation rather than the referent was the focus of devotion. When the distinction between the two muddled a clear understanding of who – and not what – was the source of agency, authorities stepped in.

In 1581, for example, the “sacred image [*sacra Imagine scolpita*] of the glorious, mediating and forever virginal Mary sculpted in marble” that was above the entrance to the Convent of San Bernardo on the Venetian island of Murano was reported to have acquired animism, speaking directly and promising assistance to Donna Laura, daughter of Silvestro Bertanza and widow of Brion Samiter.¹³⁸ According to testimony presented to the Holy Office of Venice in 1584, the pitiable Donna Laura uttered a prayer as she walked past the statue. The Madonna responded with comforting words of assurance and then went on to provide bread to the desolate woman and her hungry children. Word of the event spread quickly, prompting a flood of equally solicitous petitioners to descend upon San Bernardo and causing a makeshift altar to be erected in

front of the convent. Responding to the meteoric rise of the cult, authorities determined it necessary to establish whether the statue was, in fact, miraculous or simply a catalyst for “simple superstition, or the occultic abuse of a most sacred image” (*semplice superstitione, ovvero abuso occulto della Sacratissima imagine*). Two years after Donna Laura’s devotional dialogue with the Madonna of San Bernardo took place, a congregation composed of theologians and “pious men” was assembled to assess the situation. While the inquisitorial document states explicitly that the examiners in the case followed judicial guidelines established at Trent, attempts to curtail claims of miraculous happenings, the cause of which could be demonic deceit (*suttili inganno del demonio*), were already a clearly articulated concern prompting the imposition of rules requiring official permission be obtained before any chapel was built “with the excuse of miracles.”¹³⁹

Deliberations began with a review of Donna Laura’s experience. Next, and significantly, the assembled authorities turned to the issue of popular acclaim; “The aforesaid image continues day by day to enact new, marvelous, and wondrous miracles [*a far nuovi, stupendi, & altissimi miracoli*] that [not only] liberate men and women from the most acute trials of childbirth, and crippling ailments” but also assist “those who are possessed and assaulted by other infirmities.” In short, the Madonna of San Bernardo provides “daily consolation not only to all the people of Murano and a great part of Venice but to those from other cities and neighboring places.” With this information in hand, the Holy Office pronounced legitimate the “miracles of the *Figura* and *Imagine* of the most beatific Virgin of public repute and a great comfort to the people.” The statue was allowed to remain in place, but the acts of veneration that for two years had been performed in the public thoroughfare fronting the convent were ordered moved inside the Church of San Bernardo. Henceforth, actions intended “to honor the aforesaid Image and to fulfill devotion and vows [*voti*]” would come under the purview of the bishop “in counsel with” a congregation of theologians and “pious men.” Church authorities and the devout of Venice had reached an accord. This scenario – a balancing of popular devotionism with doctrine – was not new. Popular testaments of sanctity had long been subjected to review by canon lawyers and theologians. In fact, the public voice was filtered through that of church officials.

III

DETERMINING FUNCTIONAL VALUE: ATTESTATIONS OF FACT AND FAITH

Gratia gratiam parit (One favor begets another).

Latin proverb cited in Erasmus, *Adages*, 1.1.34

For it is good to hide the secret of a king, but honorable to reveal
publicly the works of God.

Tobias 12:7

Not as the world gives do I give to you.

John 14:27

On September 10, 1306, Nicholas of Tolentino (born ca. 1246) died. Soon thereafter, his Augustinian brothers led by Tommaso da Fermo initiated a campaign to have the popularly acclaimed preacher, confessor, and miracle worker declared a saint. First, however, Nicholas had to do in death what he purportedly had done in life. He had to demonstrate sanctity through the continued performance of miracles. By late spring of 1325, Nicholas's reputation for holiness (*fama sanctitatis*) as evinced by hundreds of postmortem miracles was such that Pope John XXII (pontificate 1316–34) authorized an inquiry into the proposed candidate's case (*causa*). Thus, on July 20, formal canonization proceedings (*canonizationis processus*) began at the *abbazia* that had been home to Nicholas for much of his adult life.¹ Between July 23 and September 28, a panel composed of bishops from Senigallia and Cesena, the Benedictine abbot of San Pietro in Perugia, a lector of the Augustinian order, and the prior of Nicholas's monastery, as well as some Augustinian brothers and representatives of the *comune* of Tolentino, listened as 365 witnesses related 371 miraculous

incidents in support of the holy man's *causa*. Reflecting papal resolve to evaluate the authenticity of popularly offered evidence through a systematic and rational investigative process, the recorded depositions bear the unmistakable impress of twenty-two procedural articles. Devised with the dual objective of insuring evidentiary accuracy and uniformity, the *articoli* sent to Tolentino set forth the manner in which questions were to be posed and responses recorded.² Meanwhile, within the Grand Chapel of the *abbazia*, in which Nicholas had been laid to rest, advocacy of another kind was occurring. As deponents told authorities how Nicholas saved them from certain death or cured them of an affliction they had long endured, a team of painters at the behest of Tolentino's monastic community and with the guidance of Peter of Monte Rubiano's *Vita Nicolai*, covered the walls of the Grand Chapel with a monumental fresco cycle celebrating the man whose *fama sanctitatis* was being avowed by carters, tanners, metalsmiths, and others (Plate 6). Like the notarized depositions recorded in the *canonizationis processus*, the fresco cycle promoted Nicholas's case with a roster of miracles, depicting the would-be saint quelling turbulent seas, healing the sick, saving the unjustly condemned, and resuscitating the dead.

More than a century passed before the *causa* of Nicholas of Tolentino was at last decided. On June 5, 1446, Pope Eugenius IV declared him a saint. Despite the lapse of time between the death of Nicholas and his canonization, devotion to him had not waned. The sick and the threatened continued to seek his assistance and, upon its receipt, traveled to Tolentino to acknowledge his efficacy with prayerful thanks and votive offerings. By 1490, *tavolette votive* began to appear among the candles, figurines, small legs, arms, and heads made of cast wax, inscribed silver plaques, and other *voti* placed at the holy man's sepulcher, which reportedly had a representation (*[i]cona*) of Nicholas (*depicta ymago dicti fratris Nicolai*) positioned above it.³ While the collection of votive panels at Tolentino is notable by reason of its size – approximately 130 late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century examples have survived – quantity is not what makes this group of images so significant. What distinguishes the Tolentino collection from others of comparable size is the saint to whom they were donated. Some 90 percent of extant early modern *tavolette votive* were dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the great *mediatrix nostre intercessionis*, whose sanctity, in contrast to that of Nicholas of Tolentino, did not require papal scrutiny and adjudication. The fact that the investigative record into Nicholas's *fama sanctitatis* has survived offers the singular opportunity to consider *tavolette* in conjunction with other forms of advocacy. Like the miracles recounted in the *processus* document, as well as those pictured on the walls of the Grand Chapel, these votive paintings credit Nicholas with an array of miracles. Although some disclose little about the circumstances that prompted the panel's donation, others depict a traumatic incident with a level of specificity equal to that recorded in the depositions taken some 150 years earlier.

Postdating Nicholas's canonization, the Tolentino *tavolette* not only confirm the 1446 decision in favor of Nicholas's *causa* but also reassert the arguments proffered on his behalf in 1325, including that of one Francesco Andrioli of Macerata. In the *processus*, the testimony of Francesco Andrioli appears as *Miraculum CXCIV*. After identifying the said deponent by name, the document relates Francesco's account of his fight with his brother, Napoleone. According to the deposition, tempers flared between the two siblings prompting Napoleone to cut off Francesco's right thumb, which he then hurled a distance of some "XV feet or more." Racing to retrieve his severed digit, Francesco testified that he invoked Nicholas with the following words:

O blessed Nicholas of Tolentino, you know too well how often and how many letters I wrote on your behalf in support of your canonization. I beg and beseech you to demonstrate your virtue, so that I will not lose my hand and this finger, because I promise to go to Tolentino and visit your tomb and offer a hand [made] of one *libbre* of wax and to fast on the vigil of your feast day [September 10] and to continue to write on your behalf without being paid whenever I do so.⁴

The document goes on to state that Francesco, in fact, did travel to Tolentino and that he did "offer at the tomb of the said Nicholas the hand of wax as promised." As for his continued advocacy of Nicholas's *causa*, the deposition is itself an eloquent testament to a kept promise. Francesco informed his examiners that after only fifteen days the only visible evidence of injury was a slight scar, a sure sign (yet also a mnemonic trace) that Nicholas had performed a miracle. Ultimately, Francesco's testimony and that of the other 364 witnesses proved convincing. On February 1, 1447, more than 120 years after John XXII received the dossier concerning the holy man's *causa*, Pope Eugenius IV (1383–1447), himself an Augustinian, issued a papal bull declaring Nicholas of Tolentino a saint.⁵

Although conveyed more clearly than in most depositions, Francesco Andrioli's recalled words of appeal indicate that in some sense a request for divine intercession positioned the petitioner in a contractual relationship of exchange with his or her intercessor. Certainly, Francesco's recorded deposition suggests that the actions he performed following his remarkably rapid recovery – fasting, pilgrimage, votive donation, and testifying on Nicholas's behalf – were in response to his receipt of an act of grace. The various formulations of the votive inscription *Voto Fatto Grazia Ricevuta* sustain the contention by making it clear that these offerings were left at an intercessor's shrine in recompense for saintly assistance. In other words, they were given *after* an act of grace had been bestowed. The very notion that a personal solicitation of help from God initiated a sequence of exchange raises questions about the nature of that exchange and the perceived relative value of what each participant offered the other. What did Francesco Andrioli believe he had achieved by his

devotional actions – specifically what role did he perceive to be performed by the actual votive object he placed at Nicholas’s tomb? And of those who saw it in the company of a cast-wax head left on site by Cola, the son of Benedicte, who lived in San Severino; a cast wax leg left by Annuchie Mathei de Cingulo, who had fractured his back and could not walk; the *ymaginem pedis de cera* deposited by Mituchia Francisco de Stiliano, who had been made lame by a fistula on his foot; and other *voti* – what did they understand these things to be and do?⁶ How, in other words, were these objects, which were by and large undistinguished in material and facture, perceived in evaluative relationship to the act of intercession they acknowledged as having been received?

HUMBLE “GIFTS”: QUESTIONING TERMINOLOGY AND REFLECTING ON STYLE

The routine labeling of ex-votos “gifts” by modern scholars implicitly answers at least some of the questions just posed. Yet we should be judicious in accepting the implications of the term because our terminology does not wholly accord with that of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century writers of miracle books. When in the mid-fifteenth century Flavio Biondo surveyed the accumulated “offerings of gold and silver, wax and pieces of cloth, [and] garments of linen and wool” filling the Basilica of the Madonna of Loreto, he pronounced ex-votos “striking evidence [*argumentum*] that God listens to the prayers of supplicants through intercession of his Mother.”⁷ About a century and a half later, Giuseppe Alamanni, the Jesuit responsible for compiling the miracle book documenting wondrous interventions by the Madonna of Mondovi, whose sanctuary lies about eighty kilometers due south of Turin, agreed. Votives left by Antonio Cordero, for example, were *in ricognitione delle due gratie*: his liberation from prison and his survival of a serious fall.⁸ In his miracle book of SS. Annunziata, Luca Ferrini characterized his own offering as “il testimonio della ricevuta grazia.”⁹

Paolo Morigia, the prolific Jesuit author of books celebrating all things having to do with Milan, looked similarly upon the assortment of objects left by *i nobili* and *i ignobili* at the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Fonte on the outskirts of Caravaggio. In his enumeration of the miracles enacted by the Madonna and the restorative waters of a spring that issued forth on the site of her apparitional encounter with a young peasant girl in 1432, Morigia repeatedly refers to ex-votos as things given *in testimonio* or, although less often, things offered *in memoria*. The donated crutches and plaque offered respectively by Caterina of Parma and Giovanni Battista Tadini can stand as representative examples of votives given *in testimonio*. Infirm with gout and despairing of obtaining help from doctors, the sixty-year-old Caterina invoked heavenly assistance from the Madonna del Fonte. Her prayers were answered. Cured, she traveled the 130

kilometers from her home to Caravaggio where she left her no-longer-needed crutches *in testimonio del miracolo*. The circumstances leading to Tadini's donation of *una tavola* inscribed with a dedicatory verse were different. Illness had kept the suffering preacher and theologian in bed for several days. Still, Tadini's offered *tavola* served the same purpose as Caterina's *croccie*, for it too, according to Morigia, was given *in testimonio della ricevuta gratia*.¹⁰ No less than others, the elite appear to have regarded ex-votos as commemorative testaments. Thus, for example, Francesco Sforza, third Marchese of Caravaggio, offered the Madonna a silver statue *per memoria di tanta beneficio*, while Ludovico il Moro, Duke of Milan, left at the sanctuary a gold *tavola* given *in memoria della desiderata gratia ricevuta*.¹¹

As demonstrated by a *tavola* brought to the Madonna del Fonte's shrine in 1492 by the townspeople of Treviglio, communities acknowledged this function no less than did individuals. Morigia's discussion of Treviglio's donation is particularly useful because it remained visible above the entrance into the Chapel of the Chiesa Vecchia until at least the beginning of the seventeenth century. In contrast to the *tavole* left at Caravaggio by Francesco Sforza and Ludovico il Moro, which Morigia described as objects of remembrance of the benefice of grace (*grazia ricevuta*), the communally given *tavola* is explicitly said to have "represented" *la memoria* of an occurrence. On the very day the Caravaggini celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of Mary's apparitional visitation, a fierce storm hit the nearby town of Treviglio, whose residents scoffed at reports of the Madonna del Fonte's efficacy. Having described the bright skies under which the enlightened residents of Caravaggio honored the Madonna, Morigia relates how a gathering darkness shrouded the disbelieving inhabitants of Treviglio. As heavy clouds transformed midday into midnight, howling winds bent trees to the ground. Until this very moment, says Morigia, the Trevigiani had denied the Madonna's miraculous appearance and scoffed at reports of her wondrous miracles. Now, they took the threatening weather conditions as signs (*segni*) of God's displeasure. Recognizing the *errore* of their lack of faith, the residents begged forgiveness and with one voice made a vow that they might be liberated from the consequences of their obstinacy. Forming a procession and reproving their mistake, the chastened Trevigiani made their way to the outskirts of Caravaggio. There "they offered *una tavola* that represents the memory of this event [*che rapresentasse la memoria di tal fatto*]." ¹²

Reading Morigia's *Historia & origine famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio* and other texts of its kind, one becomes aware of the near absence of the noun *dono* as well as the verb *donare*, words that would suggest ex-votos were seen – as contemporary scholars imply – as gifts or things that were given in the sense of gifting.¹³ Early modern writers seem to have preferred a different terminology, one that suggests the functionality of the object and implies the humility of the act of offering. Material objects given *in testimonio* of the

receipt of grace or *in memoria* of a miracle are reported as having been offered (*offrire*) or presented (*presentare*) to an intercessor. Votives were carried to (*portare*) and preserved at (*conservare*) a sacred site to honor and praise (*ad honore et laude*) the responsive saint. In light of this, it seems wise to review the transactional circumstances in which these things operated. While questioning the accuracy of placing ex-votos under the rubric “gift” may sound like a semantic quibble, drawing attention to differences in terminology – ours versus that of early modern authors – should be taken instead as a call for a more careful consideration of the principal condition of exchange in which votive objects and acts, through repertoires of devotional reenactment and reexperience, were understood to operate and thereby determined to have value.¹⁴

Following the publication in 1924 of Marcel Mauss’s “Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques,” scholars have isolated, investigated, and analyzed the changing conditions of gifting that have enmeshed people and things in complex networks of social relationships: economic, legal, political, ethical, and religious.¹⁵ As Natalie Zemon Davis has stated, these researches – her own deserve inclusion – have rendered the “gift landscape” a field of transaction “more nuanced than Mauss’s pairs of voluntary-and-obligatory, gratuitous-and-interested.”¹⁶ Because gifting is usually seen as relational – gifts are capable of forging alliances, creating dependencies, defining hierarchies, and establishing social cohesion between individuals and even among communities – the practice is frequently discussed with or defined against other modalities of transaction, such as commodity and barter exchange. Regardless of what is exchanged – money for goods, goods for services, services for favors, favors for gratitude – calculative value emerges as a factor of each relational transaction.¹⁷ In terms of human interaction, something – monetary remuneration, fealty – is expected in return for something else.

When the interaction is between God and man, it is difficult to apply the same rules of exchange or situate the exchange within the same system of evaluation. Grace, faith, and conscience operated on a wholly different level from that of money, goods, and allegiance. Such things are, as Jacques Derrida argued in his critique of Mauss, “beyond recompense or retribution, beyond economy.”¹⁸ As Alexander Nagel has stated, Derrida “draws explicitly” on a tradition of Christian thought concerning the reciprocity and gratuitousness of the gift in “terms clearly established in the sixteenth century” – specifically, the “rigorous, antireciprocal, Augustinian conception of the gift” of divine grace expounded by reform-minded thinkers like Juan de Valdés, Marcantonio Flaminio, and Cardinal Reginald Pole.¹⁹ As discussed in the *Beneficio di Cristo*, an influential tract written by the Benedictine monk Benedetto Fontanini and revised by Flaminio that circulated widely before being placed on the index of prohibited books in 1549, God’s grace and favor is distinguished as a true gift.²⁰ As such, the *munus Dei*, unparalleled in its greatness and generosity, can be

neither solicited nor returned in kind. Moreover, because the gift of grace and salvation was experiential, its receipt was conditioned by faith alone. As Paul stated in his letter to the Ephesians (2:8): “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this not by your own doing, it is a gift of God.”

Defining divine grace as a gift beyond quantifiable recompense, and therefore as something of supraeconomic value, renders it resistant to the conditions of what Aristotle termed the “requital of services,” a system of two-way exchange based upon the distinctly human tendency to weigh expectation against obligation.²¹ At the same time, it situates grace within the framework of Seneca’s *On Benefits*, a treatise that was popular in the sixteenth century. Edited by Erasmus in 1515 and 1529 and published in an Italian translation by Benedetto Varchi in 1554, *On Benefits* begins with a discussion of benefaction and ingratitude, a vice Seneca deems unfortunately all too common.²² There is always, Seneca warns, the possibility that a benefit might be wrongly received, that it might prompt in the recipient an unwanted sense of indebtedness. He nonetheless counsels against being dissuaded from acting with generosity. The usefulness of Seneca’s essay for understanding the functional role of ex-votos within the context of sixteenth-century theological debates on grace and miracles rests principally on two points. The first is the distinction Seneca makes between the form of the bestowal (*species rei*) and the bestowal itself (*ipsa res*). The second is the recognition that a gift does not have to be reciprocated. It can be, and in some cases must be, one-directional. Imparted by God, an act of intercession was just such an antireciprocal gift. A miraculous cure or rescue can be appreciated, therefore, as conforming to the spirit of gifting conveyed in Hebrews 2:4: “God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will.” Hence, and as Bernhard Jussen demonstrated, early texts “almost never speak of the reciprocation of gifts.... The oft-addressed basic problem of give and take between this world and the next [or, we can add, between those residing on earth and those dwelling in heaven] was not reciprocation but regard and acceptance.”²³

Nonetheless, a public acknowledgment of God’s bestowal of grace was expected. According to St. Augustine (354–430), to profess was to confess (*confiteor*), meaning, etymologically, to corroborate, to confirm testimony.²⁴ It was an act that performed the specific function of producing faith. Augustine made the point repeatedly in *Sermones* and stressed it in *The City of God*. Lamenting that miracles are “known only to a very few persons” because they tend to be “reported [only] to the faithful by the faithful,” he sought to expand the community of true believers by relating one miraculous cure after another. He urged others to do likewise, directing stories of miraculous occurrences to be “read in congregations that they may be believed.”²⁵ Augustine’s words resonate with the language later employed to describe ex-votos in early miracle books.

As evidence of “the manner in which God, through his ... saints, could stretch into their [humanity’s] midst the right hand of his healing power,” wax *immagini, tavolette votive*, and similar testimonial offerings visibly displayed around thaumaturgic images performed the same task as the stories read to congregations – each one, as was said in reference to the Madonna dell’Impruneta, “testifying to the singular privilege, gift, and grace that God has posited in and given to the painted image” (*testificativi del singolare privilegio, dota e grazia che Iddio ha posta e data alla imagine*).²⁶

Any attempt to fit neatly acts of intercession and votive donation (for received grace, or *per grazia ricevuta*, if not in anticipation of the soul’s salvation, or *pro remedio animae*) within this discourse is difficult. On the one hand, the one-to-one transactional nature of invocation seen to exist between a pious petitioner and a solicited saint adheres to the conception of faith as unmediated experience. Supplicants frequently found and expressed their faith without clerical intervention. Indeed, and as so many narrative scenes on votive panels illustrate, devotional dialogues of the sort that resulted in the offering of ex-votos most often took place in the home, on urban streets, within prison walls, along country roads, and on the high seas rather than within a specifically sacred setting. On the other hand and in contrast to the concept of grace as a gift that cannot be solicited, invocation is a deliberate and calculated request for help. Moreover, the transactional relationship between a supplicant and a saint seems to have been perceived to entail a two-way exchange, even though that which was exchanged – a simple and often ordinary object for an extraordinary act – could not be characterized as *quid pro quo*. Invoking assistance involved making promises that had to be kept. Miracle books are unambiguous concerning the presence of this ethic and the consequences of ignoring it.

Invariably, compendia of remarkable healings and rescues include at least one punitive miracle, a conspicuous cautionary tale of a supplicant who, having received heavenly aid, failed to fulfill his or her promise to honor the benefactor. Slighted intercessors were said to deal harshly with such failures. Sickness, madness, loss of limb, and other ills reportedly befall the negligent and ungrateful recipient or, alternatively, are inflicted on his or her child or spouse. Yet for all their horror and apparent permanence, the effects of punishment are temporary if disbelief is equally transitory and amends are made. Rectifying the oversight and embracing faith are reported to result in the restoration of loss. Miraculously, sanity returns to the crazed, and as goes the story of Aurelia del Prete’s punished affront to the Madonna dell’Arco of Naples, a new pair of feet grows to replace what was lost as the result of a blasphemous insult!²⁷ Tales of retribution may very well point to what Nagel characterized as – and sixteenth-century elites like the learned Benedetto Varchi (1502/3–65) and Cardinal Gasparo Contarini (1483–1542) observed to be – “a notable coarsening” of doctrine as it passed from learned circles to the larger

public, but the popular embrace of simple and roughly made votives suggests that in some contexts doctrine was actually expressed through an object's lack of refinement, its humbleness.²⁸ It is not unreasonable to think that the very ordinariness, even crudeness, of an ex-voto was at least to some degree gauged to emphasize through contrast the extraordinariness of a gift of grace bestowed by God. Steadfast humility also insured a votary's adherence to decorum, for had not the King of Kings been physically reduced to the "most abject of men" (Isaiah 53:3) through his passion.

The contrast of substance and origin – the humbleness of a material object purchased in the marketplace and typically made with little consideration for its durability versus the eternal magnificence of a benefice emanating from heaven – points to the deep-seated belief that something given to God was not a return "gift" per se but rather something rooted in the heart and born of faith.²⁹ After all, as Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1380–1471) argued, "The greatest offering [*munus*] that man can offer [*offerre*] God is the good and perfect will to serve God as long as he lives."³⁰ In their pronounced simplicity of style and unpretentiousness in materiality, *tavolette* underscore this sentiment. In doing so they can be seen to reflect an ethic and aesthetic of purposeful humility that had long been advocated. St. Augustine repeatedly noted that Christ, "that true and benignant Redeemer brought low by His humility," demonstrated the very majesty of God by "taking the form of a servant," a form Paul described as one of "no reputation." Moreover, Christ selected individuals "of lowly birth, unhonoured, and illiterate" to be his disciples.³¹ Paul called upon the general populace to join the Christian community in a like manner. In his letters to the Corinthians and the Philippians, he stated that, because God in His infinite wisdom had chosen the foolish, the weak, and the despised, it was incumbent upon humanity to "do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but [only] in humility" for that alone becomes the *servus Jesu Christi*.³² Viewing critically the classical "pride" in eloquent language as a manner in stark contrast to the simplified syntax of Scripture, Augustine extended Paul's exhortation to humility to include the act of writing or, rather, the choice of style.

I resolved then to bend my mind to the Sacred Scripture, so that I might see what kind of books they were. But what I came upon was something not grasped by the proud ... something utterly humble in its hearing but lofty in its doing, and veiled deep in mystery; and I was not such as I could enter into it, or bend my neck to follow it. For not as I now speak did I feel when I turned to those Scripture; for they seemed to me unworthy to be compared to the stateliness of Cicero; for my conceit was repelled by their simplicity.³³

Further on in *Confessions* Augustine again contemplated the paradox of Scripture, "utterly humble" in its rhetorical structure yet wholly "lofty" in the

significance of its meaning. “I referred to the depths of Scripture’s mysteries ... more venerable and more worthy of religious credence, for while it lay open to all to read, it reserved the majesties of its mysteries within its profounder meaning, stooping to all in the great plainness of its words and lowliness of its style,” yet demanding the most intense contemplation.³⁴ Set on the foundation of Pauline doctrine, Augustine’s appreciation of the high in the low, his pointing to the venerable in the despised, recognizes value in the humble and complexity in that which seems simple.

It is not difficult to hear the echo of the voices of Paul and Augustine in Cardinal Giovanni Domenico’s (ca. 1356–1419) warning against the practice of framing paintings in gold and silver and approval of icons that, although unadorned and covered in soot, reveal great truths, or to hear it in Erasmus’s later contrasting of “the letters of all poets and philosophers, chiefly the followers of Plato,” with “Holy Scripture, which being in a manner like to Silenus of Alcibiades, under a rude and foolish covering includes pure divine and godly things.”³⁵ It is far more difficult to view the frequently coarse style and base materiality of *tavolette votive* as reflecting the same aesthetic, for while these panel pictures commemorate a miracle emanating from God, they cannot rightly be described as disclosing divine mystery in a way comparable to, say, a Eucharistic wafer. However, in their unassuming ordinariness, this corpus of images can arguably be seen as a visual equivalent of the *sermo humilis*.³⁶ Illustrating God’s grace with exempla taken from everyday life and presented in a language comprehensible to the ignorant no less than to the literate, such sermons acknowledged the extraordinary in the ordinary. *Tavolette* can be viewed similarly. Moreover, as humble offerings, these panel pictures gave material and visual expression to the words said by priests in preparation for the Mass: *In spiritu humilitatis et in animo contrito suscipiamur*.

Certainly, style as well as size distanced *tavolette* from the grandiose altarpieces and complex fresco cycles produced for and within the “system of ‘contracts’ – the economy of vows, dedications, and endowments” – that typically regulated religious works of art.³⁷ In their humbleness as objects and humility in style, *tavolette*, like other popular votive forms, make no pretense to compensate for a divinely given gift. At the same time, they exhibit what Augustine described as “a kind of careful negligence,” for “as our Lord says [Luke 16:10]: ‘He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.’”³⁸ This very point, as Jeffrey Hamburger has argued, is conveyed by the “homely” and “awkward” shepherds in Hugo van der Goes’s *Portinari Altarpiece*, which in May 1483 was installed in the Church of San Egidio attached to the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence (Figure 33).³⁹ Entering a pictorial space already occupied by the blessed Virgin Mary, Joseph, and a host of angels in adoration of the newly born Jesus, these rustic figures “represent humility – their own and that of the ideal onlooker, but also that of the *sumмум bonum*, Christ himself,



33. Hugo van der Goes, *Portinari Altarpiece*, central panel, circa 1475. Oil on Panel. Florence, Uffizi. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York)

the paradoxical figure of the defiled and degraded Godhead who, on behalf of mankind, underwent the ultimate humiliation, a literal coming down to earth.”⁴⁰ There can be little doubt that the paradoxes of the despised and the exalted expressed in the *Portinari triptych* would have had particular resonance within a hospital complex. By reason of physical suffering, viewers would have been acutely aware of the vulnerability of their human condition and no less cognizant that God, in his humility, had willingly embraced this lowly physical state at the Incarnation. The juxtaposition of the shepherds and the angels, both of whom are pictured in the presence of the divine, underscores the difference of likeness. Neither the sharing of space nor the humility God exhibited in becoming man established equanimity between humanity and divinity. Juxtaposition did more than make this clear. It revealed the essential truths of each.

I do not want to deny that economics was a significant factor informing what an ex-voto looked like or how it was made. Nor do I wish to ignore the contention voiced by Domenici and others that stylistic and material simplicity

reduced the risk of seducing a viewer's eye and prompting idolatrous behaviors. My intent is to expand the way we think about the seemingly inapposite style and materiality of these humble objects and images. The unpretentiousness of popular votive offerings – their coarseness – was, I propose, wholly appropriate to their transactional context: an exchange between the exalted Godhead and lowly mankind. If the former extended the gift of grace, then the latter recognized the supraeconomic value of the gift by offering (*offrire* and not *donare*) a humble object *in testimonio* or *in memoria* of that very fact.

As is true of the medieval usage of the term *munus* as a specific form of *donum*, a consideration of the language used to record votive donations in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century miracle books can tell us much about contemporaneous perceptions of the objects and participants involved in this specific type of devotional exchange. The *libro dei miracoli* of Prato's Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Carceri is especially useful in this regard. The systematic record of *miracoli* associated with the Madonna delle Carceri probably dates close to the time of the site's foundational miracle, July 6, 1484, and papal approval two months later, on September 12, of the construction of "either a church or a hospital dedicated to the Virgin Mary" at the place where the miracle had happened.⁴¹ On July 6, an eight-year-old boy, Jacopino d'Antonio di Ser Nichola di Ser Tingo Lapovera, was playing among the ruins of an abandoned prison when he witnessed a miraculous *mutatione et segno*.⁴² A representation of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child erect in her arms reportedly detached itself from the wall on which it had been painted sometime during the previous century. Leaving the flanking figures of St. Stephen and St. Leonard in place, the Madonna set the infant on the ground and proceeded to tidy the dilapidated prison vaults before resuming her mural position. The stupefied Jacopino ran home to inform his mother of the astounding incident. She listened skeptically. Others did not. Word of the miracle spread quickly. Additional transfigurations were observed in the days and weeks that followed. On July 11 the Madonna delle Carceri, as the fresco of Mary came to be called, moved her eyes and shed tears of blood. On July 28 she again moved her eyes, this time twice. Two days later, she turned pale, and on August 4 her face became livid. The list of *mutationi* and *trasfigurationi* goes on. Miracles of healing also began to occur. Devotees of the Madonna delle Carceri grew in number with each reported miracle. So, too, did the farrago of offerings left on the site by individuals, conventual communities, and communes.

The manuscript recording all of this activity covers the time between the first miracle in 1484 and April 1487. The principal part of the text, which is written in a single hand, is divided into three distinctive sections. One records miraculous image transfigurations. Under the heading *Miracoli et gratie della gloriosa Madre Vergine Maria Delle Charcere Lanno MCCCCCLX(XXI)III*, the second section relates the foundational miracle plus 179 subsequent ones. The

third provides brief descriptions of mostly communal processions that brought costly donations to the place. It is in the latter section that the term *donare* is omnipresent, and the recording of a deposited object's monetary value routine. The Company of St. Jerome "gave [*donorono*] to Our Lady a new blouse valued at seven lire," the Company of St. Francis gave as its *dono* a silver laver bowl "valued at thirty lire," the *comune* of Charmignano in the *contado* of Pistoia "gave [*donorono*] a chalice valued at nine large florins," the *comune* of Monte Murlo "gave [*donorono*] to Our Lady a candle of yellow wax valued at 10 lire and 30 grossoni," and so forth.⁴³ The block of the text titled *Miracoli et gratie della gloriosa Madre Vergine Maria Delle Charcere* is different. Here, the term *dono* is almost never employed and a valuation is not stated.⁴⁴ Rather than communicate a donation's value (*di valuta*) followed by a monetary sum, a simple statement records that a vow or promise had been satisfied (*per satisfare a quello aveva promesso per la gratia da llei ricevuta*). This suggests that worth rested on this fact and did not reside in the fabric and facture of the offered object.

It is possible that the insistent referencing of monetary worth in the third section of the manuscript was motivated by pragmatism. On October 27, 1484, the provost of Prato's principal church (now the cathedral) lodged a complaint with the signoria in Florence concerning the embezzlement of donated goods.⁴⁵ In light of the preciousness of the material of some of these objects – gold crowns, a silver laver bowl, silk and brocade vestments (versus the crutches and assorted wax casts and modeled figures cited without information concerning their monetary value) – creating something akin to an inventory was perhaps a wise move if one anticipated the possibility of seeking compensation for loss. Yet, if this was so, then it follows logically that the value of the few objects of estimable cost reported in the section detailing *miracoli*, such as ten meters (*braccie*) of white damask, should be recorded similarly. This, however, is not the case. Conversely, in addition to listing the value of costly goods, the third section records a spiritualized gift as the giving of nothing. Poor but pious, the Company of St. Ludovico could afford to give humble devotion but nothing of material substance (*non donorono nulla ... perché è povera*). The difference between the sections of the manuscript, one recording miracles and the other processions, seems an implicit acknowledgment of the circumstances by which the donated object came to the shrine of the Madonna delle Carceri. Offerings *per grazia ricevuta* existed in direct relationship to the nongift of holy grace. Although offerings brought to the sanctuary in communal procession may have been given *pro remedio animae*, they did not originate or operate in the same devotional economy of exchange.

While particularly pronounced, the terminological distinctions made in the Carceri miracle book – between mostly communal donations and individual offerings, and between commendatory things given in general acknowledgment of sanctity and gratulant objects given in specific recognition of the

receipt of a gift of divine grace – are not unique. In *Origine della Madonna della Quercia di Viterbo* of 1571, Athanasio Nelli similarly juxtaposed the gift of a reliquary worth seventy ducats (*un dono alla Madonna di valore di sessanta ducati*), which was solemnly brought to the sanctuary in a pontifical procession attended by some five thousand people, with other offered “things” (*così molti altri offeressero*) valued at “more or less ten scudi.”⁴⁶ At the very least, these juxtapositions suggest ex-votos were understood to perform a specific function, one that implicitly recognized that the value of a gift of grace could not be reciprocated even by the most expensive of things. But if ex-votos cannot be called gifts per se then what exactly were they? The language of Flavio Biondo, Paolo Morigia, and others indicates they were testimonial things and that their value resided in this function. This begs the question: What, exactly, did they testify to? Was it the verifiable fact that a child had fallen into a well, that a ship had foundered during a storm, that brigands had robbed and beaten a traveler, that an exorcism had been performed, or did they instead bear witness to the less easily substantiated “fact” that a saint had intervened to rescue or resuscitate a child, save the seafarers and traveler, or liberate the possessed from demonic vexation? Were these things public assertions that a saint in heaven could efficaciously assist those on earth? Did they stand as tangible counterparts to verbal testimonies duly recorded by a votary? Did they in their simplicity speak to the donor’s humility and thus underscore the greatness of God? Examining the visual and verbal evidence attesting Nicholas of Tolentino’s sanctity – the fresco cycle that by 1330 surrounded his tomb in the Grand Chapel abutting the *abbazia*, the testimony recorded during the canonization hearings in 1325, and the *tavolette votive* that by the end of the fifteenth century began to compete for space with *immagini* like Francesco Andrioli’s *manus de cera* – suggests each of these questions can be answered in the affirmative.

ATTESTING MIRACLES: ADVOCATING THE CAUSA OF NICHOLAS OF TOLENTINO IN WORD AND IMAGE

Approximately a decade after Nicholas was laid to rest in the Grand Chapel and while the Augustinian brethren of Tolentino began their search of the region for witnesses willing to offer testimony on behalf of their brother, the proposed candidate’s life was celebrated in word and by image. As Peter of Monte Rubiano wrote the *Vita Nicolai*, a team of painters led by Pietro da Rimini began work on the monumental fresco cycle that still covers the ceiling and walls that surround the tomb of the charismatic preacher and acclaimed miracle worker (Plate 6). The imagery cannot be fully appreciated apart from contemporaneous events aimed at advancing Nicholas’s *causa*, which, if successful, would be a boon to the Augustinian order and the local *abbazia*. Thus, the vault and three tiers of frescoes constituting the Grand Chapel cycle, which was begun around

1312 and completed between circa 1325 and 1330, not only advocates the sanctity of the man who in 1447 would become the first Augustinian to be canonized but also promotes the mission of his order. Viewed as a unified whole, the decorative program traces the lineage of the Christian message from its revelation through its dissemination. The legacy begins in the vault's quadrants. Each of the four segments includes an enthroned Evangelist paired with an enthroned church father with the former depicted gesturing toward the latter. The gesture coupled with a prominent array of books and scrolls communicates the manner by which revelation became tradition. Moving downward, the realization of redemption through the collaboration of Jesus and the Virgin Mary is illustrated by selected episodes from the intertwined lives of the Holy Mother and Blessed Son. Finally, the lowest register is devoted to the life and works of Nicholas of Tolentino. Significantly, a depiction of the crucified Christ with Mary Magdalene at his feet and flanked by the Madonna, John the Evangelist, St. Augustine, and Nicholas is inserted between scenes of Nicholas's entry into the order and his later ministry.

Given the practical, top-down process of fresco painting sequenced to reduce the dripping of paint onto completed images, it is likely that Pietro da Rimini would have been working on the lowest register of the Grand Chapel cycle just as deponents were recounting to authorities their miraculous recovery from illness and release from danger thanks to Nicholas's intervention. It is therefore not surprising that the cycle privileges miracles over other aspects of Nicholas's *fama sanctitatis*: his famed encounters with the devil (said to be so intense that the *frate* was forced to take to his bed for several days at a time) as well as his renowned austerities (he reportedly fasted on bread and water four days each week and practiced self-flagellation with iron chains and stones).⁴⁷ Among the represented scenes of rescue and restoration (Figures 34 and 36), several can be associated with varying degrees of specificity to testimony in the *processus: miraculum* 33 (resuscitation of Filippa Baracca), *miracula* 203–6 (rescues from imminent drowning at sea), and *miracula* 207–9 (liberations from injustice or capture).⁴⁸ These are balanced by images that convey more generally Nicholas's power to heal. Facing a huddled group of supplicants, the holy man raises his hand in blessing. Here, Nicholas is portrayed as one of God's instruments, a chosen agent who “stretches into the midst [of the Christian community] the right hand of his healing power” in order that the crippled might again walk, demons cease to torment the possessed, and bodies scarred by sores return to an unblemished state.⁴⁹ In a notable departure from the typical iconography of *vita* icons, which invariably illustrate miracles as taking place in and around a holy person's tomb – the lower right vignette of the *St. Margaret Altarpiece* (Plate 2) as well as one included among the episodic scenes on the mid-thirteenth-century *St. Francis Altarpiece* in the Bardi Chapel of Sta. Croce (Figure 35) are representative examples – the scenes of miraculous intervention



34. Pietro da Rimini, Nicholas of Tolentino rescuing seafarers and the unjustly accused, Grand Chapel, Basilica of San Nicola da Tolentino, begun circa 1312, completed circa 1325/30. (Photo: author)

in the Grand Chapel feature Nicholas as a physically engaged presence. In this respect, they merge with the ever-growing number of ex-votos accumulating around Nicholas's tomb in the center of the room. Individually and together, frescoes, votive offerings, and depositions assert the continuing efficacy of Nicholas. While all of this stands as a confirmation of the definition of sanctity advanced by the papacy – “Although ... the grace of final perseverance alone is required for sanctity in the Church triumphant ... in the Church militant two things are necessary: morals [*virtus morum*] and signs [*virtus signorum*], that is works of piety during life and miracles after death” – the *vox populi* is clearly audible.⁵⁰ Bolstered by verbal and material evidence offered in *testimonio* of Nicholas's *causa*, the frescoes that portray the *frate* performing miracles illustrate, especially when viewed in conjunction with scenes of preaching and teaching, the practical realization of the promise of grace pictured above in the Grand Chapel vault.⁵¹

Heir to the Word, Nicholas's blessed lineage is underscored in a painting in which the Madonna steadies the infant Christ as He reaches forward to touch the Augustinian friar (Figure 36). The connection between the three – sacred mother, divine son, and holy man – is a visual tour de force of the passing of grace from its source in heaven to those who receive it on earth. Like a wave that washes onto and then recedes from the shore, the array of hands creates a visual flow that moves outward and is then reversed. Mary's hands move the viewer's eye to Christ. His hands direct it onward to Nicholas. Nicholas's hands continue the left-to-right sweep as they extend forward to touch those



35. *St. Francis Vita Altarpiece*, exorcism at the Tomb of St. Francis, detail, Bardi Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence, mid-thirteenth century. (Photo: Alfredo Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, New York)

assembled before him. Sick in body and spirit, the gathered supplicants raise their own hands in prayer. With this gesture, the course of movement is redirected back to where it began in much the same way that Lorenzo Monaco would visualize it some seventy years later in *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* (Plate 1). Nicholas's *causa* is further advanced through the selected scenes in the middle register, including that representing Christ's miraculous transformation of water into wine at Cana. Nicholas reportedly enacted a similar conversion of substances in December 1289. The miraculous event was not depicted in the Grand Chapel, but an allusion to it clearly inheres in the Cana episode. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that early viewers, well aware of the canonization hearings, would have missed the message, for in the *processus* Nicholas's ability to do what Christ had done was duly recorded as *Miraculum III*.

With its emphasis on the Augustinian legacy, the program of the frescoes in the Grand Chapel appears to have been devised to address principally the monastic community that had labored so diligently to advance Nicholas's cause. In fact, the message of a holy ancestry devoted to ministering to the needy could not be more visually explicit. Not only do scenes of preaching and miraculous attendance to the endangered speak to this chosen audience; so too do structured parallels between episodes in the lives of Nicholas, which are on the lowest register, and Christ, which are presented in the middle register.



36. Pietro da Rimini, Nicholas of Tolentino with the Madonna and Christ Child, circa early 1320s. Tolentino, Grand Chapel, Basilica of San Nicola. (Photo: author)

The twelve-year-old Jesus before the doctors, a story exemplifying the Son's dedication to perform "my Father's business" (Luke 2:49), is aligned with the Madonna and Christ Child extending their hands toward Nicholas, who, in healing the sick and exorcizing the possessed, also carries out God's will. In a similarly meaningful placement, the Massacre of the Innocents is pictured above scenes illustrating Nicholas saving the innocent from wrongful death from both natural causes and human injustice. This does not mean that the Grand Chapel frescoes, specifically those visualizing Nicholas's efficacy, would not have resonated with pilgrims. It is impossible to imagine that visitors entering into this sacred space would not have felt themselves to be a reflection of the pictured supplicants, alike in suffering, alike in turning to Nicholas of Tolentino in their time of need. It is equally impossible to think that pilgrims would have looked upon Pietro da Rimini's paintings but been oblivious to the hundreds of ex-votos that filled the room. Surely, the parts of the whole – the frescoes, the tomb topped by an image of Nicholas, an agglomeration of ex-votos – combined into a visual assertion of efficacy conveying what Clifford Geertz has called "down-to-earth colloquial wisdom."⁵² The Grand Chapel not only advanced Nicholas's *causa* and promoted the Augustinian order but also endorsed a tried and proven remedy for crisis resolution. To best grasp the timbre of this resonance and the nature of the espoused colloquial wisdom, it is constructive to read the *canonizationis processus* in light of the visualized hagiography of the Grand Chapel and vice versa. Doing so enables us to reconstruct the pilgrim's visual experience in the late 1320s, which in turn facilitates an understanding of the early modern preference for describing ex-votos as things offered *in testimonio*.

According to the deposition of one Paulus Alegri of Norcia, visitors entering the Grand Chapel saw in the center of the room the holy man's tomb and an image of Nicholas set above it.⁵³ If *processus* testimony is to be believed, hundreds of *immagini* – Francesco's *manus de cera*, Cola's *caput cere*, Annuchie's *gamba de cere*, Mituchia's *pedis de cera*, and other cast wax images of body parts – encircled (*cingo/ingere*) the sepulcher and statue. Paulus Alegri reported that such things were continuously being deposited. In addition to wax heads, hands, and feet, a few counterweights and measures were visible, including, for example, a candle that equaled the height of a son left on site by the boy's grateful father (*candelam longam quantum erat dictus puer*). There were also some painted wax figures of Nicholas (*similitudinem dicti Nicolai*) and a tablet (*tabella*), which at this early date was in all probability made of metal or wax.⁵⁴

In 1325 painted *tavolette* had yet to reemerge as a popular votive form. These would begin to appear among the *voti* deposited at Tolentino only during the last decade of the fifteenth century. Sixteen panels have been dated to the 1490s.⁵⁵ Of that number, ten were single dedications: two to the Madonna and eight to Nicholas, who is always identified by one or more attributes: a radiant sun, a book, or the lily that references him as *virgo a Deo electus* (virgin chosen by God). The remaining panels were offered to both. Six panels included inscriptions. The four that remain legible speak of sickness but only in the most general of ways. The votary is said to have been *ammalato*, yet the cause of illness is not specified. Other *tavolette* datable to this decade are even less revealing. Like the contemporaneous panel from Lonigo discussed in the introductory chapter (Figure 2), four of the Tolentino *tavolette* from the 1490s depict a male votary kneeling out of doors in prayer, his hat held reverently before him. Another six depict men and two portray women praying from their sickbeds. One shows a solitary woman genuflecting within an undistinguished interior space, and three include a child tucked into a cradle. Fourteen show the intercessors elevated either within an aureole of heavenly light or emerging from clouds. The other two represent the saint and supplicant on shared ground (one within an interior, the other set against a blue sky). Although each of these early *tavolette* portray the votary, and thus identify the donor's gender and suggest his approximate age, the information they impart is only moderately more than that disclosed by *immagini* of an injured body part. To be sure and as illustrated by a panel dated August 1, 1582, sickbed scenes remained popular (Figure 37; also see Figure 23), but increasingly these were joined by idiosyncratic scenes of assault and combat, depictions of fire consuming homes and earthquakes destroying buildings, and the like.

By and large, sixteenth-century *tavolette* at Tolentino match the scale of the earliest panels at the site. They also tend to exhibit the same simple style. Figures and features are defined by line with little or no shading added to impart volume. Compositions include only what is most essential. If indicated



37. Anonymous, bedside scene, *tavoletta votiva*, dated on verso, August 1, 1582. Tempera on panel. Tolentino, Basilica of San Nicola. (Photo: author)

at all, place is principally a suggestion: an interior or exterior space, an urban or agrarian setting. Yet, as the sixteenth century progressed, votive paintings assumed greater specificity, functioning increasingly as visual documents *in testimonio* or *per memoria* of a particular event. Several examples suffice to illustrate the point. In relating what happened, one relies almost solely on image. The other two supplement the visualized scene with informative inscriptions. The first, painted in tempera, features a two-story house marred by cracks and gaping holes that point to the devastation of earthquake (Figure 9). The painter has removed the front-facing wall of the second floor to reveal a family of six huddled in prayer among the wreckage. The tight group is identified in the two-word inscription painted directly beneath on the exterior wall in black, block letters: “Viadana Av[u]to.” Although the palette is extremely limited, the artist has maximized its visual effects, using alternating patches of red amid



38. Anonymous, Francesco Magnano wounded by a gun misfiring, *tavoletta votiva*, 1537. Tempera on panel. Tolentino, Basilica of San Nicola. (Photo: Paul W. Jacobs, II)

the browns and black to focus the eye on the assembled Viadana family. A second example of the turn toward specificity is a *tavoletta* offered by Francesco Magnano in 1537 – the donor’s identity and the dedication date are included in the panel’s inscription (Figure 38). Here there can be no doubt about the nature of the incident that prompted Francesco to offer Nicholas an ex-voto. In fact, the image even hints at a sequence of unfolding events. Francesco is represented standing next to a table on which rests a harquebus. Smoke and fire emerge from the gun’s barrel. Behind the votary a blazing hearth laden with a smith’s hammers and tongs indicates precisely what Francesco Magnano (the votary’s name, *magnano*, or smith, does as well) was doing in the moments before the harquebus misfired, wounding his left hand and causing a rush of blood to pool on the floor between his feet. Lest there be any confusion about the visualized incident, the inscription states, *Magnano nettando uno archibusio se abrusiò la mano*. Beyond the pictured and verbalized circumstances of the accident, the *tavoletta* as a votive object communicates the rest. It stands in *testimonio* of Francesco’s call for help, Nicholas’s response to that call, Francesco’s miraculous recovery, and of course his fulfillment of a vow.

Among the corpus of panels evincing a preference for the specific rather than the generic that, in addition to panels like that offered by Francesco Magnano, includes a man caught in the mechanism of a skein winder (Figure 39), a



39. Anonymous, accident involving a skein winder, *tavoletta votiva*, early seventeenth century. Tempera on paper affixed to panel. Tolentino, Basilica of San Nicola. (Photo: Paul W. Jacobs, II)

young girl in midfall from a second-story window, a horse and rider plunging from a precipice into a river, and a prisoner with his wrists bound and ankles shackled, the *tavoletta votiva* offered by Nicola da Camerino on behalf of his daughter Chiara is perhaps the most explicit (Plate 7). In this example, which is more than two times larger than any other *tavoletta* preserved at this site, a protracted inscription combines with fairly detailed imagery to relate a successful exorcism. The ritual, as described in word and image, was performed on Chiara da Camerino by Augustinian priests in 1589. On this panel Nicholas of Tolentino is shown twice. Hovering above the altar and set against a golden-yellow aureole that signals his sanctity and suggests his spiritual *praesentia*, he is figured as an apparition. In this state of blessed being, he attends to the prayers of Chiara's family kneeling before him. Above this figuration and in the company of St. Augustine and the Madonna, he is represented more conventionally as one of several observant intercessors watching the ritual from the heights of a heavenly cloud. In accordance with directives prescribed in exorcism manuals (which are discussed in Chapter V), the procedure is represented as having been performed in a church. Its interior takes up the right two-thirds of the composition. The wasteland of hell is rendered in the remaining space, which also accommodates the inscription. Assisted by four of his brethren, the exorcist, clearly identified by the *stola* draped around his neck, leans into the

tormented Chiara. She, in turn, falls away from his onslaught against the devil as a dozen small black demons spew forth from her mouth. As they flee into the gaping maw of a hellish monster they form an arc over the altar that is bisected by the apparitional Nicholas.

With or without inscriptions, these and other sixteenth-century *tavolette votive* present a legible record of crisis situations as factual events, for it is indeed possible to verify whether or not an earthquake struck, confirm the misfiring of a gun, and substantiate that an exorcism was performed. As ex-votos, however, *tavolette* go beyond visualizing that which can be asserted as fact through the corroboration of witnesses. In crediting crisis resolution to divine intervention, something that is implicit not only in a votive object's function but is explicit in the requisite representation of the observant intercessor[s] – often at the critical moment of intense distress – *tavolette* avow that which must be accepted on faith: a miracle occurred. Because the laity viewed miracles as the most incontrovertible evidence of sanctity and proof of God's *praesentia* on earth, and clergy saw them as an “identifying mark of the True Church,” they required verification.⁵⁶ The procedural mechanics of a *processus*, which established authoritative filters through which the popular voice was required to pass, performed this adjudicating function in cases of canonization. Although authorities are known to have periodically rid thaumaturgic shrines of popularly offered ex-votos, these material testimonials of the miraculous came into public view through the efforts of the *ignobili*, *poveri*, and the *idioti* without interference. Like remedies disseminated through medicinal recipes and lessons put forth by proverbs, the evidence of efficacy professed in votive paintings was appraised first by the *publica et fama* and then by church hierarchy in an attempt to bring popular perceptions in line with doctrine.

MIRACLES, SANCTITY, AND THE TESTIMONIAL POWER OF THE VOX POPULI

Reflecting perhaps the near absence of the term *miraculum* in the Vulgate, the literature seeking to define a miracle is extensive and historically contentious.⁵⁷ The theological definition has nonetheless remained remarkably consistent for centuries.⁵⁸ In *On the Profit of Believing* (*De utilitate credendi*) and *Against Faustus* (*Contra Faustum*), St. Augustine of Hippo distinguished miracles as extraordinary phenomena produced by God and therefore as occurrences that are above, against, and beyond nature (*supra naturam*, *contra naturam*, *praeter naturam*). As he explained in *Against Faustus*, 26.3, “contrary is here used in the sense of contrary to human experience of the course of nature.” In *On the Profit of Believing*, 34, he added, “I call that a miracle, whatever appears that is difficult or unusual above the hope or power of them who wonder.” Accordingly, the wonder (*mirari*) induced by a miracle (*miraculum*) cannot be explained as

having some cause within the natural fabric or disposition of the “material” that is “removed from the senses” and hence merely *seems* inexplicable (he cites Aristotle, who in *Metaphysics* notes, “for instance, fire burns”). Neither can a miracle be said to have originated in human endeavor or come about *ex arte*, that is, through the intervention of physicians, magical conjuring, or demonic meddling.⁵⁹ God alone is the principal cause of a miracle. However, as Augustine explained in *City of God*, others are designated to act as an instrument of divine compassion.

For whether God Himself wrought these miracles ... or whether He wrought them by servants, and if so, whether He made use of the spirits of martyrs as He uses men who are still in the body, or effects all these marvels by means of angels, over whom He exerts an invisible, immutable, incorporeal sway, so that what is said to be done by the martyrs is done not by their operation, but only by their prayer and request; or whether, finally, some things are done in one way, others in another, and so that man cannot at all comprehend them, nevertheless these miracles attest this faith.⁶⁰

Recalling Paul’s healing of the sick as told in Acts 19:11–13 – “And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” – Augustine supplied in both *The City of God* and *Confessions* numerous examples of the Lord working through His chosen agents.⁶¹ In an example with striking parallels to the episode recounted in Acts 19, he describes how the “darkness of [a] blind man was shattered by light” when he touched a cloth first to the recently discovered remains of Protasius and Gervasius and then to his own unseeing eyes.⁶²

Augustine’s language – *supra naturam*, *contra naturam*, *praeter naturam* – became standard in theological tracts on miracles and prominent in the discourse on sanctity. In considering the role of faith in miracles, which in and of themselves are “filled with admirable wonder,” Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) followed Augustine, stating such things are “wrought independently of natural causes.” They are instead wrought through faith, which comes “not from reasons pertaining to nature and the senses but from things pertaining to God.” Aquinas thus contended that in some cases, as Gregory noted of St. Peter and St. Andrew, this predisposition enables a holy man to act as God’s instrument.⁶³ Contemporaneously, the influential canon lawyer Goffredo of Trani (d. 1245) held miracles to be enacted *ex Deo non ex arte*, to be against nature (*contra naturam*), that they are able to be performed by meritorious individuals (*ex merito hominis*), and that they fortify faith (*ad corroboracionem fidei*).⁶⁴

Advocates for Nicholas of Tolentino as well as devotees of other saints did not need to be informed of this “fact” through the words of learned theologians

and jurists. In churches throughout Italy the faithful encountered images of miraculous healing *ex merito hominis*: Andrea Bonaiuti's fresco in the Spanish Chapel of Sta. Maria Novella of 1366–68, depicting devotees of Peter Martyr scrambling to get as close as possible to the saint's remains (Figure 10); the similarly enthusiastic pilgrims pictured in Giusto de' Menabuoi's *The Faithful at the Tomb of the Blessed Luca Belludi* of 1382, in the Conti Chapel of Sant'Antonio in Padua; the less chaotic but equally emotive assemblage clustered around and draped over the tomb of St. Margaret in a scene on her *vita* icon from the Cathedral of Montefiascone (Plate 2); and Paolo Veneziano's *St. Lucy Polyptych*, circa 1350, which, in a panel preserved now in the Bishop's Chancery, Krk, shows a pilgrim pressing her cheek directly against that of Lucy. In later centuries such scenes were a staple of popular prints used for private devotional purposes. Adamo Scultori's engraving of San Francesco di Paolo (1577) includes sixteen vignettes depicting the saint's miracles; a broadsheet associated with Titian, circa 1524, frames St. Roch with eight episodic pictures (Figure 40); and the anonymously engraved *Life and Miracles of St. Albert, Carmelite* has seventeen episodic scenes.⁶⁵

Images like these, which typically include scenes depicting the crippled on crutches, the blind with bandaged eyes, pregnant women in a state of collapse, and the possessed with ominous demons hovering above their heads, made vivid and kept current the words of St. Irenaeus (ca. 115/25–ca. 202) and St. Jerome (ca. 347–420). In the first case, Irenaeus had marveled how the power of God, working through the spirit of holy martyrs, is able to “confer sight on the blind,” “hearing on the deaf,” “chase away all sorts of demons,” and “furnish effective remedies for those external accidents which may occur.”⁶⁶ In the second, Jerome recorded Paula's first exposure to the tombs of prophets in the Holy Land. “She shuddered at the sight of so many marvelous happenings.”⁶⁷ Yet, with the passage of time, the cheek-to-cheek communion pictured in Paolo Veneziano's *St. Lucy Polyptych* became less possible. Placed under episcopal or monastic control, relics were removed from both the sight and touch of the laity except for brief moments on special feast days.⁶⁸ Similarly, the process of verifying miracles was increasingly subject to ecclesiastical direction as the church endeavored to harness popular faith. With bulls of canonization consistently validating the contention that saints are God's representatives, investigative standards for judging the authenticity of popularly professed miracles were devised.⁶⁹ Embracing the established belief that miracles were *supra naturam*, *contra naturam*, *praeter naturam*, authorities held that a *miracolo*, or *cosa soprannaturale*, was not to be mistaken for a *maraviglia*, or *cosa rara*.⁷⁰ Although extraordinary, *maraviglie* could be explained by the laws of nature. *Miracoli* could not. More than a century before proceedings were initiated to review Nicholas of Tolentino's *causa*, formal commissions were established as part of the process by



40. Circle of Titian, *St. Roch*, circa 1524. Woodcut. London, The British Museum (1860-4-14-140). (Photo: The British Museum)

which popularly professed “facts” were adjudicated by systematic and rational investigation.

Reflecting directives in texts such as Pope Alexander III’s (1159–81) letter to the king of Sweden that was subsequently incorporated into the *Decretalium D. Gregorii Papae IX* of 1230, and which, in turn, informed the *articuli interrogatorii* employed in Pope Gregory’s (1227–41) instructive *Acta Canonizationis S. Domenici* of 1233, and Thomas Aquinas’s *Commento alle Sentenze* of 1252–56, *Summa contra gentiles* of 1258–64, *De potentia*, and the later *Summa theologia* of 1265–74, the corpus of sermons collected under the title *Collationes* written by Clement VI before and during his pontificate (1342–52) marks the peak moment in the “marriage of theological theory and canonical practice.”⁷¹ Yet before this date and as papal directives to canon lawyers, theologians, and notaries in the canonization cases of St. Rose of Viterbo (1252) and St. Clare of Assisi (1255) demonstrate, procedures for determining the authenticity of miracles were already subject to judicial standards of review.⁷² Paralleling the interrogatories recorded in diplomatic documents, testimony in these cases addressed normative issues: *quis, quid, quomodo, quibus auxiliis, cur, ubi, quando* (who, what, how, for what purpose, with whose assistance, where, when).⁷³ Not surprisingly, these same standards are in evidence almost seventy-five years later in the *canonizationis processus* of Nicholas of Tolentino.

The notarized depositions in the *processus* begin with the declaration “whereby” (*quod*) followed by the name of the witness, who is further identified by one or more of the following: place of residence, familial relationship (wife of, son of, and so on), and social condition or occupation. In several instances the trustworthiness of the witness is underscored through a reference to character. “Domina Johanna,” for example, is said to be a woman of high regard (*publica fama*). The document notes further that there are no rumors circulating to contradict her unblemished reputation, a circumstance that secured Johanna’s credibility as a witness.⁷⁴ Next in the systematic response to a fairly fixed formula of inquiry, the deponent asserted that a prayer was answered. Each witness then proceeded to explain briefly the circumstances that prompted the prayerful call for intercession: the death of a child prior to baptism, a near drowning, intense pain of toothache or hemorrhoid, unjust imprisonment, and so forth. The record goes on to state that the witness was freed (*fuit liberatus*) from suffering, cured of an affliction, or rescued from danger or injustice following invocation and, crucially, that this liberation cannot be explained by some natural occurrence or attributed to the intervention of doctors or magical intrusion. In other words, it was a phenomenal occurrence, a type of happening described contemporaneously by the Florentine banker-chronicler Giovanni Villani (before 1277–1348) as “sopra l’corso d’ogni natura.”⁷⁵ Considered in the context of votive culture, these happenings – *supra naturam, contra naturam*,

praeter naturam – were taken as evidence of the extraordinary and munificent presence of heaven in the ordinary affairs of man.

From its formal beginnings, the process of canonization was viewed by canonists as a judicial procedure and the resultant act of canonization as a judicial verdict.⁷⁶ The air of legality weighting a ruling was unmistakable. As conducted after 1588, a year distinguished by the formation of the Sacred Congregation of Rites and the resumption of papal canonizations following a hiatus of sixty-three years, the “actual mechanics” of the process did not differ significantly from earlier methods.⁷⁷ However, as Simon Ditchfield has argued, “the intensely legalistic rather than theological cast imparted to canonization trials after 1588 represented a significant change of degree, engendering a thirst for written evidence and a rigour in its examination without precedent in the history of canonization.”⁷⁸ A comparison of the canonization processes of the thirteenth-century Dominican Raymundo Peñaforte, which began in the late sixteenth century and is “generally regarded as the first mature expression of the new rigor,” and that of Nicholas of Tolentino conducted more than 250 years earlier illustrates the point. While an adherence to protocol and a quest for verifiable evidence are apparent in both, the new and “intensely legalistic” level of examination noted by Ditchfield cannot be missed in the *processus* of Raymundo Peñaforte. The taking of depositions lasted less than three months in Nicholas’s case. By contrast, Raymundo Peñaforte’s hearing was a protracted affair that began on January 11, 1597, and concluded more than four years later on April 29, 1601. It actually involved two hearings: the *Processus inquisitionis et informationis*, a preliminary hearing to establish the candidate’s reputation for holiness (*fama sanctitatis*) in order to determine if his case should advance, and the *Processus remissoralis et compulsoralis*, during which evidence was collected for evaluation by the three principal judges of the Court of the Rota.⁷⁹ Intensified scrutiny was motivated by Rome’s determination to distinguish the practices of Catholicism from those of Protestantism, yet it also served to bring localized interests and popular voices under the purview of curial bodies constituted by the pope. The importance of this should not be dismissed because the designation of individuals as saints was tantamount to a definition of sanctity. Because miracles (as opposed to personal virtue) were held to be external, observable, and verifiable, their authentication was crucial. Pope Sixtus V’s request in 1590 that “witnesses and public documents” pertaining to the life and miracles of St. Roch be sent to Rome from Venice for evaluation, a request that generated much consternation in a city in which dedication to the saint was high, is indicative of post-Tridentine efforts to assert papal authority over the local and the popular.⁸⁰ Sixtus’s request cannot be distanced from the publication of tracts focused on the subject, including Angelo Rocca’s *De canonizatione sanctorum commentarius* (first edition, 1601), which has chapters on *Miraculum supra naturam*, *Miraculum praeter naturam tribus modis*, and *Miraculum contra naturam*.⁸¹

Coinciding with these events, *tavolette votive* appear to have enjoyed a surge in popularity. I do not presume to be able to explain the apparent increased appeal, but I would suggest there are interesting parallels to be made between the unprecedented emphasis on verification in cases of proposed sanctity taking place at the highest levels of the church and popular attestations of faith occurring by and large without clerical mediation at the other end of spectrum. In considering the significance of ex-votos at this time, it is worthwhile to recall Simon Ditchfield's observation concerning the cult of saints during the same period. "Just as the traditional top-down view of Tridentine liturgical reform needs to take account of 'reciprocity within inequality' ... so the consideration of the cult of saints simply in terms of a 'revival accompanied by an increase in central control of the sacred' ... needs to be nuanced."⁸² There can be no doubt that attempts by church authorities were made to redirect popular – and independent – access to the supernatural into orthodox channels, but as Robert Bireley has pointed out, "often enough tacit compromises were reached between authorities and popular pressures."⁸³ Attesting miracles with votives, especially the visually specific "tablets, paintings, and stories" (*tableaus, peintures et histoires*) seen at Loreto by Montaigne and at other sites by other sixteenth-century pilgrims appears to have been one arena in which the public voice was audible enough to allow mutually beneficial compromises to be negotiated.⁸⁴ Indeed, to some degree the practice of votive donation can be viewed as a popular appropriation of an adjudication process that ecclesiastical authorities had long sought to control, for clearly these images, which were material manifestations of the public voice, stood as verifications of the miraculous.⁸⁵

The *vox populi* articulating popular sentiments and assessments held an established place in Renaissance legal practice. Although in mid-fifteenth-century Bologna, for example, local-district officials were obliged to denounce certain types of violent crime, they were required to give an account of "only those for which there was public report." Able to be corroborated by eyewitnesses (*testimoni di veduta*), these tended to be offenses perpetrated in a public space during daylight.⁸⁶ In Florence, where evidence might rest on "what was widely known, reputed, or [simply] rumored to be true," public perception similarly informed presumptions concerning what really happened.⁸⁷ In fact, perception counted for a lot in assigning guilt and proclaiming innocence since throughout late medieval Italy "proof [could] be by *fama* [reputation] alone ... as if there were real proof."⁸⁸ The effects of public perception and popular repute were by no means restricted to the judicial arena of the secular. Reports of miracles traveled far, wide, and quickly. The miracle book of the Marian sanctuary at Tirano provides an example. On September 15, 1505, a desperate father cradling his dead son in his arms arrived at the place made sacred by Mary's apparitional visitation to Mariolo Homodei only one year

before. "Having heard talk of the prodigious miracles performed by the perfect and glorious Holy Virgin Mary in this holy place," he had traveled nearly 250 kilometers from Innsbruck to the Valtellina shrine. Work on the church had begun only a few months earlier, but already an altar stood on the site where Mary and Mariolo had conversed. The father placed the lifeless body of the *putino* on the altar (*sopra lo sancto altare*) and celebrated two Masses. Then he waited. Two days passed before the infant was perceived to exhibit signs of life and was then hurriedly baptized "in the presence of many witnesses" (*in presenza di molti testimoni*).⁸⁹ Five years later, on November 12, Leonardo da Moritz traversed the Alps carrying the corpse of his stillborn son. He, too, placed the tiny body on the sanctuary's altar (*super altare*), prayed, and waited. After three days, Leonardo's infant son was professed to have "moved his mouth, opened and closed his eyes, [and] cried."⁹⁰ As in the earlier case, the child was quickly baptized.

As in other instances of resuscitation reported to have taken place at Tirano – the miracle constitutes 28 percent of the total – revived children were baptized "in the presence of witnesses." The insistent repetition of the phrase *in presenza di molti testimoni* echoes generally a refrain found in hagiographies. In the *Leggenda Assidua* of St. Anthony of Padua, the *Leggenda di S. Pietro martiri*, and *Leggenda beata Agnetis* of Montepulciano, for example, miracles are verified by "the eyes of everyone" (*gli occhi di tutti*) and confirmed by "the tears of everyone" (*tutti in lacrime*).⁹¹ Like the four notaries who compiled the list of miracles attributed to Tirano's Madonna dei Miracoli, Fra Arcangelo Domenici was well aware of the significance of public attestation. Certainly he employed it to persuasive effect in his account of Gian Jacopo Grandone's dramatic donation of a *tavoletta votiva* at the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco on January 6, 1596. Although Grandone's receipt of Mary's grace took place in an isolated location far from public view, his rescue was confirmed as a miracle by communal acclamation. Entering the sanctuary while Mass was being said, Grandone is described as having stripped off his shirt *in presentia di tutti*, displaying to the assembled crowd the horrible spectacle of a body scarred by dozens of knife wounds. The sight seen *a tutti quej signori et signore* was taken as visible proof of the efficacy of the Madonna dell'Arco. Only a miracle of holy intervention could explain Grandone's survival of so vicious an attack.⁹²

Narratives of this sort indicate that the collective recognition of the miraculous carried the testimonial weight of approbation.⁹³ Such popularly professed miracles were not ignored. A long-established tradition, accepted by canonists, placed the initial identification of a saint in public hands. Popular acclaim was often the catalyst instigating an official investigation into an individual's *fama sanctitatis*.⁹⁴ As the miracle books of Marian shrines at Tirano and Naples convey, the public voice also figured in the establishment of thaumaturgic sites associated with the Virgin Mary.

THE SPECIAL CASE OF MARY

Since 431, the Virgin Mary had occupied a principal and unique place in the theology of the Western Church, a place that, because of the prophecy of Simeon in the Gospel of Luke (2:35), made her “second in rank only to the Godhead,” the most favored among the saints, and thus the one who assumed “much of Christ’s function as intermediary between God and man.”⁹⁵ In that year, the Christian bishops who had convened at Ephesus for the Third Ecumenical Council declared Mary “Theotokos,” “the one who gave birth to the one who is God.”⁹⁶ In and through her, it was argued, God the Logos “formed man around himself” thereby uniting the divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ.⁹⁷ The designation did more than make this flesh and blood woman the guarantor of Christ’s humanity. In accordance with Simeon’s prophecy that “a sword will pierce your own soul also,” Mary participated in her son’s suffering. Her body experienced his agony, for the sword that pierced Christ’s side had simultaneously pierced her soul, making her one with her son. A communion prayer verbalizes the essence of this unique inseparability of mother and child. Beginning with the phrase “O Jesus living in Mary,” it concludes with a request directed toward the Holy Mother. “Mary, I come to you with childlike confidence and earnestly beg you to take me under your powerful protection. Grant me a place in your loving motherly heart.”⁹⁸ Lorenzo Monaco’s *The Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* (Plate 1) can be viewed as a visual counterpart to this appeal. Both prayer and painting recognize that because Jesus is within Mary, access to the munificence of the son is through the compassionate intercession of the mother. In the words of Bernard of Clairvaux, Mary “is our *Mediatrice*, she is the one through whom we have received thy mercy, O God.” Thomas Aquinas put it this way: “She was so full of grace that it overflows on to all mankind.”⁹⁹ Like other authors of miracle books, Paolo Morigia echoed the sentiment. In *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio* he acknowledged Mary’s special status as the Mother of Grace (*Madre delle Gratie*), referring to her as the comforter of the suffering and the hope of the afflicted (*consolatrice de’ tribulati, e vera speranza degli afflitti*), the advocate and protector of the faithful (*avvocata e protettrice fedelissima*).¹⁰⁰

The Virgin Mary was also singular by reason of her ascension. Having risen to heaven in body as well as in spirit, she left behind scant material evidence of her earthly existence: some drops of milk were preserved at Montevarchi and Walsingham, strands of hair were kept at Laon, her shift venerated at Chartres, her belt revered at Prato, her house enshrined at Loreto. This small smattering of relics left her virtually untethered and, therefore, able to be at any place – a private home, a public piazza, an isolated wood, a well-traveled road – at any time. Yet Mary’s near freedom from fixity of place or things was repeatedly

countered by an insistent turn to material objects, such as paintings and statues said to have animated, and to tangible signs – the trace of a footprint left in evidence of an apparitional visitation further asserted by a bronze plaque proclaiming, as at Tirano, *Ubi Steterunt Pedes Mariae*. On the one hand these testamentary representations and traces underscored Mary's special status among the saints by pointing to the omnipresence of her *praesentia*. On the other – and paradoxically – they mitigated it. By foregrounding material things and physical places, Mary (or manifestations of her presence) became subject to a scrutinizing process of inquiry just as other saintly persons did.

Individuals claiming to have seen paintings and statues exhibit signs of life – among them the Madonna delle Carceri, which detached itself from the wall and moved about; the Madonna dell'Arco, which bruised when struck by a ball; and Lonigo's Madonna dei Miracoli, which bled and reached toward her injured cheek when stabbed – were questioned by authorities. So, too, were Mariolo Homodei at Tirano, Gianetta at Caravaggio, a farmer and his two sons in the fields of Vall'Alta, two *contadinelle* in Gallivaggio near Como, and others who reported encounters with Mary. These and other such singularly witnessed claims required verification by communal acclaim and inquisitorial review, especially in the wake of Trent's directive to halt “any abuses that may have crept into [the] holy and saving practices” involving “the invocation of saints ... and use of sacred images.” The deposing of Donna Laura, the widowed and destitute daughter of Silvestro Bertanza, and other witnesses by the Holy Office of Venice in 1584 concerning the purported animation and agency of the statue of the Madonna positioned above the entrance into the Convent of San Bernardo on the island of Murano (discussed earlier) illustrates the review process as it played out for a newly proclaimed miracle-working image. The Holy Office convened three years after the first reported incident (Laura maintained the marble figure had verbally promised to feed and protect her and her children) and then only in response to the fervent devotionism that ensued in the wake of Laura's claim. Acknowledging that the people of “Murano and a great part of Venice ... [as well as] other cities and neighboring places” flock to the site to fulfill their vows (*adempir la divotione, & voti*), the illustrious council of judges bowed to popular sentiment. The miracles associated with the *Figura & Imagine della Beatissima Vergine* of public repute (*fama publica*) were declared legitimate. Acts of veneration were thus allowed to continue. However, they were no longer permitted to take place on the street in front of San Bernardo. Henceforth, veneration was restricted to within the walls of the church.¹⁰¹

The popularly acclaimed Madonna of San Bernardo was by no means singular in facing inquisitorial review by authorities.¹⁰² Indeed, long-established legends, including that of the translation of the Holy House of Nazareth to Loreto, as well as sacred images that had been venerated for centuries were also

scrutinized.¹⁰³ Although long venerated, the Madonna Bianca of Portovenere in Liguria (*una carta antica sculpita l'Immagine della Gloriosa Vergine Maria*) was reaffirmed as a sacred image in the early seventeenth century. The story of the *trasfigurazione* of the Madonna Bianca began just after vespers on the Sunday evening of August 16, 1399. According to notarized testimony given by “a certain man named Luciardo, an inhabitant of Terra di Portovenere,” the deponent was “dismayed and stupefied” (*sbigottito e stupefatto*) by changes that altered the appearance of an old image of the Madonna and Child that was nailed to a wall in his house. Luciardo reported that the image, a hand-colored woodblock print, had been darkened by age to a degree that rendered it barely decipherable. Suddenly, he said, the dim, illegible *carta* inexplicably brightened and regained its original color. More astoundingly, the pictured Madonna changed her gesture, raising her left hand to join it with the right as if to pray.¹⁰⁴ Although the documents recording this event fail to explain how word of the miraculous transformation spread, it did. Throughout the remainder of that night, “everyone in the area,” a “great multitude of men and women of Terra and many strangers passing through the area,” witnessed this and other miracles. The next day, the miraculously transfigured image was carried in popular procession from Luciardo’s home to the parochial church of San Lorenzo. There, “in the presence of all the people,” and with the parish priest and the notary Michele da Vernazza as witnesses, miracles continued. The sick were “liberated from infirmity,” and the possessed were freed from the clutches of malign spirits. The document recounting this series of happenings, which also includes a list of the names of some sixty individuals as *testimoni di veduta* of the Madonna Bianca’s first miracles, concludes with a statement that not only asserts the authority of the testimony it proffers by making clear that the evidence is that of eyewitnesses but also seeks to verify its own authenticity by tracing its lineage. “The present document [*Instrumento*] was made by the hand of Messer Giovanni di Michele di Vernacia, a public notary, who was present at all of the above noted miracles [*fu sempre present a tutti li sopradetti Miracoli*], which then was put into the *volgare* from the Latin by the priest Messere Pietro di Biassa ... in the year 1513 on the 23rd of May; and then in the year 1612, on the 15th of March, Brother Antonio de Benedetti of Genoa of the Order of St. Augustine made a new record [*ricorretto*].”

The Portovenere document has several notable things in common with the inquisitorial review of the San Bernardo statue. To begin with, the purported first miracle occurred to a single individual without witnesses. Only Luciardo saw the Madonna Bianca’s first *trasfigurazione*, and only Donna Laura heard the Madonna of San Bernardo’s first comforting words. Second, the occurrence of subsequent miracles, which always are reported to take place before groups of people, function as corroborating evidence for the singularly experienced first miracle. Third, clerical authorities establish as theologically sound claims of

the miraculous that have been advanced by popular attestation. Following this established trajectory, interiorized piety is propelled into the public discourse where it receives validation. In this manner, personal experience is transformed to communal knowledge.

The process of adjudicating Mary's sacred presence did not slow the establishment of new Marian sanctuaries. Although pilgrimages to reliquary shrines like that at Tolentino remained robust during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, an ever-increasing number of sites dedicated to the Madonna, like those at Prato, Tirano, Caravaggio, Lonigo, and the Neapolitan neighborhood of Sant'Anastasia, became popular destinations. Mary's special status – her *fama* as the great *Mediatrice* – bolstered by new reports of miraculous intervention worked through her image certainly contributed to the increase in Marian devotionism. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Marian sanctuaries totaled more than 115 in the province of Brescia alone.¹⁰⁵ The distancing of the laity from holy relics, which made miraculous cures less contingent upon actual physical contact with the sacred, possibly contributed to the surge as well.¹⁰⁶ Regardless of the causes behind the proliferation of sites, the miracles professed to have occurred at these places and through these images moved the *popoli* to take to the roads.

Various processes of ecclesiastical review have muted the public voice heard in these documents. Clearly this is also the case with the *processus* of Nicholas of Tolentino. Approximately 95 percent of the 250 or so postmortem miracles given to Nicholas were reportedly worked for the laity at its own request. If this statistic speaks to the laity's unmediated access to the divine, the document recording that access says the opposite. While it can be argued that these documents “bear witness to a series of ongoing dialogues between oral and written culture, official dogma and local custom, and ecclesiastical objectives and lay instincts and opinions,” it is undeniable that the public voice was to some degree muffled by a prescriptive process.¹⁰⁷ With inquisitors posing questions devised by the pope and notaries writing responses in accordance with prescribed *articoli*, it could not be otherwise. Popular attestation is also filtered in *libri dei miracoli*. Uniformly presenting a “formalized narrative” of the shrine's foundational miracle, which is followed by “a systematic collection of miracle stories in chronological order,” miracle books can be appreciated as a distinctive genre defined by convention.¹⁰⁸ The “formalized narrative account of the origin of the shrine” is echoed by often equally formalized accounts of miracles professed by shrine visitors. Although miracle books claim to be first-hand accounts of miraculous interventions, they are instead accounts of what votaries told a third party, usually a clerical custodian or other individual with a vested interest in promoting the site. In this way, miracle books are no less effective in shaping popular testimony. Ex-votos stand in contrast to both of

these forms of public profession. To be sure, *immagini* of cast wax and terracotta figurines were typically nonindividualized objects made for an open market; it nonetheless must be acknowledged, as Montaigne's diary documents, that the placement of a *voto* within a sanctuary was often determined by the votary. In this respect, ex-votos publicly asserted the miraculous with little or no interpretive intrusion. Among *voti*, *tavolette* were singular in their declarative ability because they most directly represented the *miracolato* and the *miracolo*. It cannot be argued that cast and modeled wax *immagini* made reference to the votary's body, suggestively fusing the given object with the giving self, or that contact objects like crutches and shackles functioned similarly. But as pictures that always represented the votary, the intercessor, and not infrequently the confronted crisis, *tavolette* had a level of specificity that enabled them to function as testamentary documents in a way that other votive objects could not.

With their emphatic reference to the votary's own voice, *tavolette* inscriptions acknowledge the specificity of the individual donor: "I, Madonna Pira, wife of Zenobia of Senigallia"; "I, Piero Giovanni Gianfrancesco of Caldarola"; "I, Bernardino of Perugia"; "I, brother Giordano of Naples." The formula of self-declaration is a variation on the standardized opening of a documented *processus* deposition. The nature of the variation is telling. Instead of *quod* (whereby) followed by the deponent's name, panel inscriptions begin with an assertion of self: *io* followed by the votary's name. Predictably, the uniqueness of the experience comes through most clearly in the more protracted inscriptions. A panel at Santa Maria di Castello in Genoa demonstrates the point. A family of four dressed in white nightshirts draws the eye to the central portion of the picture. Kneeling, an older man reaches back toward a standing youth with his left hand and with his forward extended right directs the viewer's attention to a heavenly vision of the Crucified Christ with the Madonna and St. John. Immediately behind this father and son coupling, a woman holding a tightly swaddled infant close to her breast similarly kneels and focuses her attention to the holy vision. The two multistory buildings filling much of the right half of the panel explain their reverential posture. One structure is consumed by fire. As the flames coming from the chimney of the adjacent building indicate, it has spread. The protracted inscription complements the image with specifics, relating in experiential detail how "I, Laurenencio Carrega, found myself" (*ritrovandomi io Laurenzio Carrega*) on the fateful Monday morning of September 20, 1569. Having gone to bed at three, Carrega inexplicably woke up at six. His curious waking proved fortuitous. His house was on fire. He had just enough time to rouse his family and flee before flames engulfed his home.

Despite the specificity of the image, it is the detailed inscription on Lorenzo Carrega's *tavoletta* that imparts the greater degree of documentary exactitude. This reflects common production practices. Panels depicting



41. Anonymous, birth scene, *tavoleta votiva*, circa 1595–1605. Tempera on panel. Sant’Anastasia (Naples), Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco. (Photo: with kind permission of the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco)

like events point to the circulation of models within workshops and across regions.¹⁰⁹ These models, in turn, suggest a familiarity with, if not a dependence upon, scenes of resuscitation (Figures 17 and 18), the rescue of seafarers, expulsion of possessing demons (Figures 62 and 66), and other miracles commonly represented on *vita* icons, on historiated altarpiece predellas, and in fresco cycles. That said, the painters of *tavolette* did not always base their pictures on the readily visible imagery found within a sacred setting. A comparison of *tavolette* offered in the wake of a birth (Figures 41, 42, and 46) to paintings of the wondrous births of Mary, Jesus, and John the Baptist provides a case in point. As one of the vignettes of Giovanni del Biondo’s late fourteenth-century *vita* icon of John the Baptist, Pietro Lorenzetti’s *Nativity of the Virgin* (commissioned sometime around 1340 by the Opera del Duomo for the Cathedral of Siena), Carpaccio’s *Birth of the Virgin* (painted for Venice’s Scuola di Santa Maria degli Albanesi around



42. Anonymous, breech birth scene, *tavoletta votiva*, circa 1595–1605. Tempera on panel. Sant’Anastasia (Naples), Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco. (Photo: with kind permission of the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco)

1505) (Figure 43), Andrea del Sarto’s fresco of the theme in the atrium of Florence’s SS. Annunziata of 1514, and numerous other examples show, sacred births are scenes of postpartum quiescence. The trial of labor done, Anna, Mary, and Elizabeth are decorously shown resting as others bathe and swaddle their newly born infants. By contrast, the scenes of childbirth on *tavolette* depict the actual birthing process, an ordeal with high rates of mortality for both mother and child. Because *tavolette* often represent a critical moment in a life-threatening situation in order to convey the trauma of the experience, this focus is not surprising. This is not to say that *tavolette* with scenes of childbirth are not similar to one another but, rather, to observe that in this case artists did not look to the established iconography of sacred art for guidance. They were documenting the quotidian.



43. Vittore Carpaccio, *Birth of the Virgin*, circa 1504. Oil on canvas. Bergamo, Accademia Carrara. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource)

DOCUMENTING THE QUOTIDIAN WITH SPECIFICITY

A comparison of two strikingly similar yet tellingly different panels donated to the Madonna dell'Arco following the safe delivery of a child, neither of which has an explanatory inscription, points to the respective artist's attempt to individualize an experience endured by many. On the basis of stylistic affinities with dated panels, the two *tavolette* appear to have been painted circa 1595–1605 (Figures 41 and 42). With both panels lacking informative inscriptions – each is minimal, with only the formulaic “V.F.” (*voto fecit*) followed by what are presumably the initials of the donor – it is left to the pictorial to tell the tale. The two artists chose to do this in ways that suggest a shared reliance on a compositional model. Within an undefined space, the expectant mother, gripping the arms of a birthing chair for support and aided by attendants, labors to deliver a child. The expectant father, his back turned to the birthing scene,

kneels, grasps his hands together in supplication and, looking upward, directs his prayer to the intercessor encircled within an aureole of clouds. These similarities do not blind us to differences, the most readily apparent being the number of represented intercessors.¹¹⁰ One panel acknowledges the Madonna dell'Arco as the sole intercessor. In the other she is joined by St. Joseph and St. Leonard, who among other patronizing duties was called upon to assist women in labor. A more studied examination reveals an even more notable difference. One panel represents a normal delivery, the other a breech birth. If this can be taken as an indication of a panel functioning *in testimonio*, then other elements in these paintings underscore that function. Neither reflects the idealized conventions of scenes of sacred births that would have been familiar through countless paintings and relief sculptures representing the births of Mary and Jesus, yet both have affinities with illustrations in medical texts with practical, real-life application, such as the 1559 edition of Michele Savonarola's *Pratica major* (Figure 44). I do not want to argue that *tavolette* painters were blind to representations of sacred births. Neither am I asserting that they consulted illustrated medical texts. Although the parallel imagery seen on houseware objects specific to childbirth, such as majolica bowls and salvers (Figure 45), is more promising as a possible model, it seems more likely that both reflect the shared visual language of popular culture with *tavolette* accommodating the specifics of individual experience.¹¹¹



44. Michele Savonarola, *Pratica major*, 1559, fol. 272. London, Wellcome (closed stores EPB/D5786/D)

At the time the two Neapolitan *tavolette* were made, the assistance of male surgeons and doctors was a rarity. However, by this date, male physicians, having gained “a grip on [an] apparently profitable profession,” were increasingly called in to help with complicated deliveries, such as a breech presentation.¹¹² One panel illustrates this very condition. The infant’s feet can be seen emerging first from beneath the laboring mother’s skirts. Accordingly, here a male doctor replaces the midwife. Seated on a low chair before the mother and with his sleeves rolled-up to his elbows, he reaches forward to help guide the infant through the final passage of the birth canal.¹¹³ Reflecting practices of the time, midwives or female attendants have been relegated to a supportive position slightly behind and to either side of the birthing chair. At the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco, this is one of two panels still extant recording a breech birth. The second example (Figure 46), which identifies the laboring mother as



45. Nicolo da Urbino (attrib.), birthing bowl, 1525–30. Majolica. London, Victoria and Albert Museum (C. 2258&A-1910). (Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum)

Giovanna Andrea Cingaro yet lacks a date, appears to have been painted by the same hand. The distinctively rough handling of line and awkward rendering of form is unmistakable. Yet, for all of their sameness, even these two represented births are recorded as distinctive, experiential events. In one, the father kneels in supplication. In the other, a female relative appeals to the Madonna. Details such as these are meaningful. Implicitly they convey the same message found in votive panel inscriptions that begin with *Io*. The panel stands *in testimonio* to a particular individual's singular experience.

Reflecting in conclusion on the language that characterizes ex-votos as evidentiary objects, things given *in testimonio* and *per memoria*, the questions posed earlier can be raised again with specific reference to *tavolette votive*. What exactly did these small paintings testify to? Was it a verifiable event, the fact that a mother and child had not died during birth, that a traveler had survived a brutal attack by bandits, or that an exorcism had been performed? Did they bear witness to a miracle and in this way unite with other votives to



46. Anonymous, breech birth scene, *tavoletta votiva* offered by Giovanna Andrea Cingaro, circa 1595–1605. Tempera on panel. Sant’Anastasia (Naples), Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco. (Photo: with kind permission of the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco)

assert efficacy by public acclamation? Did they stand as testaments to a votary’s reputation, his or her fulfillment of a promise? Did they proclaim the greatness of God’s gift of grace through their humbleness? The answer to all of these questions is yes.

IV

NARRATIVE MODES

Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances.... Narrative ... is simply there, like life itself.

Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 1977¹

Telling stories about particular experiences is the primary human mechanism for bestowing meaning upon them. They reveal not so much actual happenings as the underlying meanings attributed to events.

David Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy*, 1998²

Communication does not stand apart from reality. There is not, first, reality and then, second, communication about it. Communication participates in the formation ... of reality.

Richard V. Ericson, "How Journalists Visualize Fact," 1998³

With a remarkable economy of words and consistency in language, miracle-book entries note that ex-votos aver four things.⁴ First, the votary suffered a debilitating illness or confronted a life-threatening situation (*in pericolo di morte*). Second, having abandoned all hope for help from a physician or other human being (*disperato dell'aiuto de'medici; abbandonato dale cure dei medici*), the endangered or afflicted person turned heavenward, promising in the moment of duress to honor a holy benefactor in return for divine intercession. Third, working with and through his saintly representatives, God resolved the crisis, restoring health to the diseased, rescuing the imperiled, and liberating the enslaved and possessed (*fù subito sanato et liberato*). Finally, having made a vow (*fece voto, facto el boto*) and in receipt of grace (*per grazia ricevuta*), the *miracolato* journeyed to the shrine of the intercessor who had attended to him or her in a time of need. Once there, the suppliant performed acts of veneration.

Often this included the offering of a material object that not only attested to the efficacy of the petitioned saint but also reflected well on the votary's piety and character by evincing the fulfillment of the promise made when help was solicited (*a satiffare al suo boto per la gratia ricevuta; per satiffare a quello aveva promesso per la gratia ricevuta*).

Notwithstanding differences in form – a ship model, an *immagine* cast in wax, a discarded crutch, links of broken chain, or a *tavoletta* – all *voti* held a recognized place within this well-defined sequence of events. But not all objects donated by the *popoli* were equally communicative concerning the catalytic crisis that moved a supplicant to invoke heavenly aid and, subsequently, venerate the intercessor. A wax cast of a foot identifies the source of the problem yet fails to disclose whether the intercessor helped to heal a broken bone or brought an end to the discomfort of gout. As a replica in miniature, a model ship (Figure 26) allowed viewers to associate a specific vessel and its passengers with a safe return to harbor. It did not, however, disclose why a seafarer felt compelled to offer the *ex-voto*. Was it a storm, an attack by pirates? As a picture, a *tavoletta* featuring a ship had the potential to provide details that the model did not (Figures 7 and 47). It could, in fact, answer at least some of the questions (*quis, quid, quomodo, quibus auxiliis, cur, ubi, quando*) that typically were asked of deponents who attributed miracles to a candidate for canonization or posed to witnesses claiming to have seen image *trasfigurationi*. Visualizing a signal moment within an unfolding sequence of contiguous moments, each image of experienced trauma and invocation communicated its own *raison d'être*. It is not surprising, therefore, that while early modern texts routinely recognize *voti* of all types to be evidentiary in function, *tavolette* are singularly associated with the term “narrative.”

In *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, Luca Ferrini speaks of a panel as narrating a miracle (*una tavoletta in cui era dipinto il narrato miracolo*), while in his history of the Madonna del Fonte of Caravaggio, Paolo Morigia describes a *tavoletta* as *la narratione del fatto*.⁵ Although their statements read as passing acknowledgments of the obvious, they raise questions. What, exactly, constituted a *narratione* for the early modern writer and his readers? Did the term refer to a depicted scene of action, such as a ship rocked by winds and waves, a rider falling from a horse, or a traveler struggling to ward off the blows of attackers? And what about the more static scenes of people kneeling in prayer in a nondescript landscape or sitting erect and prayerfully in bed within an unexceptional interior. Were they also viewed as narratives? Did a scene's legibility rest on a viewer's literacy of pictorial convention or require an inscription? Do the passages in Ferrini and Morigia refer specifically to representations referencing the crisis confronted by the votary or should *una tavoletta con la narratione del fatto* and similar phrases be understood more broadly – and implicitly – to include narratives beyond the pictorial field? In other words, was the sequence of prayer and



47. Anonymous, rescue at sea, *tavoletta votiva*, second half of the sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Sant'Anastasia (Naples), Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco. (Photo: with kind permission of the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco)

promise, miracle and vow fulfillment that is repeatedly sketched out in miracle books understood to be a component of *la narrazione* or a corollary to it? And what of the relational dynamics that were inevitably structured through the display of a *tavoletta* within a thaumaturgic shrine? Did pilgrims who entered a sacred setting at a later point in time perceive a second narrative as they looked upon the dozens if not hundreds of votive paintings surrounding a cultic image? Did the arrangement of a representation of the thaumaturge framed by a host of paintings depicting a variety of miraculous cures and rescues coalesce to create a *vita et miracula*, an open-ended postmortem life of miracles?

STRUCTURING NARRATIVE

A consideration of these questions must begin with an admission. There has been no shortage of criticism leveled at “the typical art-historical usage” of

the term narrative. Even when qualified as “pictorial narrative” or “narrative illustration,” terms with obvious applicability to the representations on *tavolette*, art historians have been accused of a lack of precision.⁶ In 1973, for example, David Kunzle noted the tendency of art historians to employ the word “rather loosely, applying it first of all to any sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Netherlandish picture of everyday life, in which some fairly specific action is taking place ... and second, to a picture from any school and any period which is of this character.”⁷ Fifteen years later, Wendy Steiner saw no demonstrable change. In fact, she held the “typical art-historical usage” of the word to be “very loose” and not just “rather” loose.⁸ Despite an intense and constructive grappling with the issue in recent decades, the situation has not altered significantly. The problem, and hence the criticism, can be explained by multiple factors, but of these the two most notable – and often entangled – arise from an inclination to evaluate and define one thing in light of another. The first entails the practice of “reading” images against texts. The second arises from viewing – and labeling – one image in relationship to others.⁹ All too often a visual narrative is caught in a hobbling web of dependency that, more times than not, instigates a no-win game of comparison in which the image is reduced to “a mere token, like a pictorial title.”¹⁰ Moreover, because “narratives seldom come in isolation and are seldom ‘original,’” comparisons are not limited to an image and its textual source but also include comparisons between multiple visualizations of the same text.¹¹ The long and venerable history of these comparative practices rests on, and propels into continuum, “the underlying presupposition ... that images are a priori handicapped” in competition with the verbal. After all, narrating is, as Mieke Bal has stated, “primarily a matter of discourse, not of visibility.”¹²

Efforts have been made to wrest the visual free of evaluative juxtapositions, yet the term “narrative” when linked to pictures still tends to refer to one of two things: either a visualization of a literary narrative or a visualization of an action, “as opposed to [a] static, descriptive image.”¹³ Further complicating matters is the fact that the two are often intertwined. Not infrequently a picture is labeled a “narrative” by reason of what is being set in opposition to it, such as an “iconic” image or static likeness, which itself often assumed the identity of *eikōn* or *imago* through associative practices. Mired in a complex matrix of terms – *istoria*, *eikōn*, *imago*, and effigy – the Lukan icons painted to resemble the venerated icons in Rome’s Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Maria del Popolo, Santa Maria in Aracoeli, and elsewhere that proliferated during the fifteenth century, provide a case in point.¹⁴ Finely crafted votive effigies, or donor portraits, and, less evidently, the indexical *immagini* of human anatomy are others. There is no denying the significant differences between an icon, defined here as an atemporal likeness of the sacred, and a picture that tells the story of a life by illustrating a key moment or moments with expansive chronological

resonance. Alluding to theological mysteries, the former were often perceived to be “repositories of divine presence.” Routinely placed under the rubric “narrative,” the latter were understood to capture and convey temporal and spatial contiguity.¹⁵ Seen as a material manifestation of the ineffable, an iconic image fostered meditative engagement by bringing viewers face-to-face with or in the presence of the absent person through a legible index of likeness.¹⁶ By contrast, narratives were valued as “visual cognates of history-writing.”¹⁷ Broadly speaking, they visualized romances and legends and set forth secular and sacred histories by imaging the exemplary lives of great men of the ancient past and, more relevantly here, those of Christ, Mary, holy martyrs, and saints. They did so in a manner comparable to a rhetorically effectual written account. While an iconic likeness of Christ, Mary, or a saint was an inducement for self-reflection and spiritual enlightenment, pictures of properly pious protagonists performing saintly actions were a call to action, offering viewers inspirational and edifying models of behavior.

As Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604) stated in his frequently cited letter to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles, images of this kind were to the ignorant what Scripture was to the educated. They could arouse “the ardor of compunction” in the hearts of pagan viewers and assist Christians in understanding “the stories and so learn what occurred” in the biblical past.¹⁸ There is still another problem with categorizing images in this way. The distinction between what are typically called visual narratives and those that are generally labeled iconic images is not as absolute as it might seem. As the compositional structure of *vita* icons demonstrates, the two could and did merge into one. The central portion of a *vita* icon – that of St. Margaret can be taken as representative of the group (Figure 11) – features a front-facing and full-standing monumental portrait, or *eikōn*, of Christ, Mary, or a saint. Stacked one atop another to the left and right of the monumental portrait and often running across the panel’s base, four, six, or as many as two dozen episodic scenes tell the life story of the saint whose image they frame. Viewers were presented with scenes of the holy person’s birth or spiritual awakening, performance of miracles, endurance of trials of faith, and death. Not uncommonly, a postmortem scene of *praesentia* concluded the *vita* series.

Reflective of a lived experience rather than illustrative of a textual source, the scenes on *tavolette votive* depicting invocation and thanksgiving or rescue and restoration suggest that the theoretical discussion swirling around visual narrative as briefly sketched out here is of limited relevance. This is not to say that this discourse does not relate to votive paintings. It is, rather, to contend that it does so in ways that are distinctive to this type, or genre, of works. To be sure, pictures of a child falling into a well, a man attacked by brigands, or a woman giving birth are immune to the a priori handicapping that so often informs a “word-bound image,” such as – to use Meyer Shapiro’s classic

example – Moses at the battle with the Amalekites (Exodus 17:9–13).¹⁹ That said, it must also be stated that the painters of *tavolette* made use of the visual vocabulary employed in visualizations of biblical passages and hagiographical texts. Made familiar through countless fresco cycles, *vita* icons, and historiated altarpiece predellas, it was a readily comprehensible vocabulary. When these conventions were coupled with clarifying inscriptions or cross-referenced with an entry in a miracle book, chronicle, or diary, viewer comprehension was symbiotically enriched. Except in the relatively rare instances of a dedicatory statement affixed to a panel's verso, the reading of an inscription was ideally incorporated into the viewing experience. Clearly, the painted scene could stand alone, but ideally the acts of looking and reading went hand in hand.

Although the inscription that runs across the base of Lorenzo Carrega's *tavoletta* in Genoa's Sanctuary of Santa Maria di Castello is more protracted than most, it demonstrates the interdependence of word, image, and display. With a neutral ground as an impenetrable backdrop, a family of four dressed in bedclothes kneels in supplication before a visionary presence of the Crucified Christ, Mary, and St. John. Behind them and filling most of the right half of the panel are two burning buildings. The picture and the fact of its donation communicate the basics: a family of four survived a fire. Specifics are filled in by the inscription. It supplies the "who" (Lorenzo Carrega, his wife, and their eighteen-year-old and infant sons), the "where" (the Carrega home), and the "when" (three hours after having gone to bed on September 20, 1569). Often, miracle-book entries furnish similar factual information. Other and more illuminating parallel sources are extremely rare, occurring only when the protagonist was of significant social standing to warrant documentary attention. As for the narratives that were structured through the dynamics of display within a sanctuary, these functioned in a wholly different manner. Combining a static, iconic image with episodic vignettes, the ensemble of *tavolette* and a representation of the thaumaturge was something of an open-ended hagiography, a postmortem life of miracles with the potential to be extended through time by the addition of each new scene acknowledging yet another act of holy intervention.

NARRATIVES WITHIN THE FRAME

Whether imagined or put forward as "recapitulations of a past experience," written and recited stories are presented and received linearly. An account of what happened is related through the narrator's "matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events" in a manner that allows the reader or listener to understand a series of unfolding incidents composing an episode.²⁰ Regardless of divergent opinions concerning the number of clauses it takes to constitute a narrative and despite protests against the clause-event matching

model, it is agreed that “narrative is one of the most pervasive modes of meaning production. By means of narrative, members of a given culture represent and convey happenings, ideas, arguments, experiences, imagined states of the world, and mythical theories of origin.”²¹ Given the critical, communicative role played by narrative, it is not unexpected that visual storytellers, no less than their literary and conversational counterparts, engage in the task of meaning production. Neither is it surprising that just as the field of literary narrative offers the narrator a variety of modes for conveying a series of events – an epic, a short story, a novel, prose poem, and more – visual narration provided the painters of *tavolette votive* a comparable array of pictorial modes for recording what happened. One painter might prefer the monoscenic mode, extracting a single moment within a sequence. Typically, it is one of dramatic intensity, and usually it offers the viewer some hint of the passage of time. Picturing someone in midfall (Figure 8) or in the process of physical collapse during an exorcism (Plate 7, Figure 66) is representative of *tavolette* of this type. Another painter might convey what happened by presenting an event as a continuous narrative. In this mode, two or more temporally distinct moments within the sequence are depicted through figural repetition and placement within the same pictorial field (Plate 5; Figure 13). A third painter, favoring, perhaps, the mode of continuous narrative over the monoscenic but concerned about chronological clarity, might literally separate one moment from the next, presenting the episode as a series of framed moments (Figure 57), not unlike the strip narrative format that is characteristic of modern cartoons.

Although constrained by a panel’s size and an aesthetic of humbleness, the painters of *tavolette* confronted the same principal challenge faced by any and all artists seeking to communicate a story within the visual structure of coexistent simultaneity. They had to decide how to bring protagonists together, how to situate them in space, and how to give shape to time. While most early modern painters of *tavolette* visualized an event monoscopically, there was a roughly even split between those who chose to single out for depiction a dramatic moment within an unfolding series of moments and those who favored the more contemplative scene of a votary in prayer. In the first instance, the rendered incident can be described in Shapiro’s terminology as a narrative of “being in action.” In the second, it can be categorized as a narrative of “being in a state.”²²

Narratives of “being in action” compress a temporal sequence into a signal and privileged moment. The excerpted moment, which can be compared to an extracted “clause,” typically belongs neither at the episode’s beginning nor at its end but, rather, at some point in between that makes it possible for the viewer to grasp a sense of the preceding and succeeding moments. *Tavolette* offered in the wake of an impending but never realized shipwreck illustrate the point (Figures 7 and 47). Roiling waves and blustering clouds, which are

suggested with gestural arcs of white, gray, and black, billow and tatter taught-stretched sails. Masts are broken by gale-force winds, and oars, no match for the tempestuous seas, are splintered. Flotsam floats atop swelling waves. Passengers lift their faces to heaven and often raise their hands in supplication. Beyond the pictured crisis, the *tavoletta*, as an ex-voto, indicates that the portrayed intercessor heeded the pleas of the endangered seafarers, bringing them safely into port.

Narratives of “being in a state” lack both the drama and specificity of the narratives of “being in action.” Without a clarifying inscription – a rare feature on a panel depicting only a votary in prayer – the viewer has no way of determining the nature of the crisis that moved the depicted supplicant to seek intercession. The uninformative nature of panels of this kind probably reflects market practices. Because the generic representation of a votary was appropriate to virtually any situation of recovery, *tavolette* of this kind could be kept in stock. Despite their one-size-fits-all quality, these images communicate a donor’s state of grace. It is a state of being born of spiritual communion, which, in turn, had been prompted by a traumatic experience. It is possible that panels of this kind sought to capture the critical moment of solicitation. It is far more likely, however, that they represent the votary after his or her reception of grace. If these panels can be seen as narratives of “being in a state” (an everyman’s version, if you will, of paintings of saints in a state of ecstasy), then the story they tell, like narratives of “being in action,” must be viewed in conjunction with the material object. Allowing the *tavoletta* as an image to coalesce with the *tavoletta* as an object communicates a temporal sequence that goes beyond the actual representation, for it is the votive-as-object that furnishes the story’s concluding chapter. Functioning much like the final clause of a “minimal” narrative told to a knowing audience, the ex-voto informs us that all ended well.²³

Although most sixteenth-century *tavolette* feature a single, signal moment of an event, there is a notable number of panels picturing multiple (usually two), temporally distinct moments. These single-setting, double-time – or continuous – narratives repeat the protagonist and other principal characters in the story in a unified space, *and* they impart a sense of ongoing action by conveying causality or sequential order.²⁴ They do not, however, demarcate space and time with framing devices. Instead, they present a lived experience in the text-based tradition of Masaccio’s *Tribute Money* of the 1420s (Figure 48), and other master works of continuous narrative.

In *Tribute Money*, a visualization of Matthew 17:24–27, Masaccio constructed the narrative in a way that moves the viewer’s attention from the center, to the left, and finally to the right.²⁵ The massive figural grouping of the apostles gathered around Jesus draws the viewer’s eye to the composition’s center where Jesus listens to a Roman tax collector’s demand for



48. Masaccio, *Tribute Money*, circa 1425. Florence, Brancacci Chapel, Sta. Maria del Carmine. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource)

tribute and charges Peter with finding it. From there, he directed a viewer's attention to the next event in the drama through an emphatically clear line of extended arms and pointing fingers. Following these directional cues, spectators see Peter stooped low over a distant lake to find the stipulated sum in the mouth of a fish. Drawn back to the composition's center by the commanding group that occupies it, the viewer is redirected to the fresco's opposite side by the tax collector. Distinguished in dress and by position – he alone has his back to us – the tax collector goes against the prevailing tide of the apostles' extended arms as he gestures right to indicate where he will wait for payment. Following this cue, the viewer sees the final scene in the story. Peter, pictured here for the third time, pays the tax collector, here represented for the second time, at the gates of Capernaum. Surely, Masaccio understood that viewers' recall of the story told in Matthew 17 would facilitate viewers' following the narrative as it moved back and across the pictorial space. He did not, however, rely solely on viewer recall to trace the series of depicted events. In addition to the directional gestures clarifying spatial movement and temporal succession, he varied figure scale and applied atmospheric effects to literally foreground the dramatic moment that was catalytic for the other two, thereby allowing the story to occur in space and unfold in time. In *Jacob and Esau*, one of the ten gilded bronze relief panels on the north doors of Florence's Baptistery of 1425–52, Lorenzo Ghiberti took continuous narrative to new heights. No less than seven moments in this drama of fraternal conflict are presented with Jacob and Esau each represented three times, Isaac twice, and Rebecca four times. Optical principles of perspective are exploited to allow different chapters from Genesis to be legibly presented within a single frame.²⁶ By the beginning of the sixteenth century, continuous narratives were visible throughout the Italian Peninsula.

Tavolette votive lack the sophisticated compositional structure of Masaccio's fresco and Ghiberti's relief, yet many have an affinity with these and similarly organized narratives. Multiple moments in a sequence are depicted, figures are repeated, and in some cases, such as a panel honoring the efficacy of the Madonna dei Miracoli, causality – the *raison d'être* for the donation of the ex-voto – is disclosed (Plate 5). The panel features two protagonists, a father and his young son, at two different moments in time within a unified setting: a street that pointedly provides a view of a church in the distance. On the right and set only slightly back from the frontal plane, a mother comforts a little boy whose neck bleeds from a wound that is explained by the scissors the child holds. The boy's anxious father stands beside his wife and injured son, his hands clasped in prayer. He obviously has solicited intercession from the Madonna dei Miracoli, for in the “next scene,” which is more prominently placed just left of center and is, albeit minimally, foregrounded in relationship to the figural grouping at right, the father of the wounded child kneels before and proffers his son to the Madonna, whose identity is made clear by her left hand held to the wound inflicted to her cheek by blasphemous thieves. The child, in turn, offers the Holy Mother, who holds her own son, the bloodstained scissors.

In addition to its easy legibility, this *tavoletta* is distinguished by the Madonna's placement. As in several other late fifteenth-century panels at this site – two are inscribed with dates, 1491 and 1499 – the Madonna, who is seated on a wooden dais that resembles a bench more than it suggests a throne, is not represented as a heavenly observer. She is instead presented as a decidedly earthbound participant in the drama. In this panel *praesentia* is not an abstract concept of the spiritual presence of a corporeal absence nor is Mary a *figura*, a figurative sign distanced from sensory experience and prophetically impressed in the *intellectus spiritualis* “like a seal stamped into wax” (*come figura in cera di suggello*).²⁷ She is quite literally in the streets.²⁸ The immediacy of Mary's availability here is underscored by her physical remoteness elsewhere. In a panel at Cesena that dates to the end of the fifteenth century, the votary is pictured kneeling in prayer before the Madonna del Monte (Figure 49). As at Lonigo, the Virgin does not relate to her devotee from on high. She is present in the very same landscape occupied by the supplicant. Nonetheless, she is materially distant. In marked contrast to the Lonigo panel, the Cesena *tavoletta* unequivocally puts forth Mary as a *figura*, for here she is rendered as an image. Framed by a cloth of honor, the represented intercessor is set atop a pedestal. With the Madonna pictured at this remove and in this state of being present, the *tavoletta* has a greater affinity with private devotional images and less in common with votive panels that communicate heaven's active participation in human affairs.

The painter of Tommaso Inghirami's votive panel (Figure 13) solved the challenge of conveying temporal sequence differently. At first glance, the exceptionally fine *tavoletta* looks like a monoscenic narrative. The painter seems to



49. Anonymous, Jacobus ab Aretino in prayer, *tavoletta votiva*, 1481 (?). Tempera on panel. Cesena, Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte. (Photo: Paul W. Jacobs, II)

have selected the most dramatically charged moment to depict. It is a moment of intensity, one tailor-made for a narrative of “being in action.” Inghirami, his robes pinned beneath the wheel of an oxcart, looks beseechingly toward his companion for help as he clutches his bible. His horse rears. With prods raised, the oxen drivers attempt to regain control over their balking beasts. In their resistance, the animals force the heavily laden vehicle backward thereby increasing the likelihood that the fallen Inghirami is soon to be crushed by the oxcart’s wheels. Although physically absent, Christ and Saints Peter and Paul are spiritually present. More than half-hidden in a heavenly cloud, the trio is represented in the panel’s upper right corner. The rendering of Christ is iconic but that of St. Peter is not. Holding in his left hand the key that identifies him and inclining his head toward the rigidly frontal facing Son of God, Peter points to Inghirami with his right. The viewer processes all of this visual information and knows how this scenario ended. The very existence of the ex-voto speaks to the outcome of the rendered scene, but what about the moments leading up to the incident that caused Inghirami to acknowledge an act of intercession in this way?

The artist has supplied this information as well. Not only did he define where the accident occurred, but he suggested its cause. Angled by the painter

to make visible its well-known sculpted relief of the triumphal procession staged by Rome in celebration of Jerusalem's fall, the Arch of Titus fills the left third of the panel. The calculated positioning of the arch also affords a view beyond the urban scene. There, small in the distance, we discern two mounted riders, Inghirami and his companion. They, of course, appear more prominently at a moment of crisis in the panel's foreground. The horse on which one of the distant figures sits is also repeated. Distinguished by an elegant bridle and now riderless, the horse as pictured in the panel's foreground rears beside the arch. The angle of the Arch of Titus and the approaching relationships to it of Inghirami and the ox-driven cart indicate a near head-on collision. Coming to this point in the road from opposite directions and from routes that apparently did not afford clear visibility of what lay just around the corner, horses and oxen, theologians and oxen drivers collided or at least came close enough to doing so that chaos ensued. Put simply, through his choice of mode of narration the painter of this *tavoletta*, who has been associated with Raphael's circle, communicated a temporal sequence that explained causality.

Few fifteenth- or sixteenth-century *tavolette votive* include either the detailed richness or compositional complexity that distinguishes Tommaso Inghirami's panel. Therefore, in order to gain a more accurate view of the different ways stories of lived experiences were told on *tavolette*, it is prudent to look at normative examples. It is also instructive to focus on representations of the same theme. For this purpose I have selected scenes of judicial interrogation in which the accused was questioned while suffering the joint-wrenching torture of the rope hoist (variously referred to in early sources as *corda*, *strappo*, or *fune* depending on the region). To twenty-first-century viewers sensitive to human rights, the many scenes of interrogation by rope hoist pictured on *tavolette* in thaumaturgic shrines throughout Italy grab appalling attention. Early texts suggest that sixteenth-century viewers were no less horrified by and terrified at the prospect of an investigative procedure known to be brutal but routine. Although procedural norms of judicial questioning in civil cases varied from one locale to another, individuals suspected of perpetrating serious crimes including homicide, robbery, destruction of property, violent or sexual assault, and the like were frequently subjected to torture by *corda*. Although the amount of pain and suffering inflicted in order to acquire a confession varied from one locale to another – in Mantua, for example, “it was laid down that torture should be inflicted in a manner appropriate and moderate, according to the quality of the person accused” – its use was widespread.²⁹ As seen in a drawing attributed to Domenico Beccafumi (1486–1551), the rope hoist called for the charged suspect's wrists to be tied behind his or her back and bound to a rope that by means of a pulley raised the hapless subject into the air (Figure 50). Interrogation took place while the accused was suspended. After a given amount of time or in response to a victim's reply (or lack of one)



50. Domenico Beccafumi, *Interrogation by Rope Hoist*, sixteenth century. Pen-and-ink with brown wash and black chalk on paper. Paris, Louvre (INV. 256). (Photo: Reunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York)

to an examiner's question, the rope was released. The abrupt drop caused the tendons and ligaments of the indicted sufferer to be violently ripped and bones to be dislocated. Usually repeated several times, this inquisitorial method could be done with or without the addition of weights tied to a prisoner's ankles. Depictions of the process on *tavolette* indicate that beatings sometimes were administered simultaneously. The accused might survive the physical torment of this frequently fatal procedure, but mental scars were enduring, as Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) made clear.

Imprisoned in Florence's Bargello between February 12 and March 12, 1513, for purportedly conspiring against the Medici, Machiavelli opened and closed the first of his Prison Sonnets addressed to Giuliano de' Medici with a reference to the torturous device. "I have, Giuliano, a pair of shackles on my legs / with six hoists of the rope on my shoulders: / my other miseries I do not want to talk about," and "One man is being chained and shackled / with a clatter of keyholes, keys, and latches; / another shouts that he is [pulled] too high off the ground."³⁰ The experience was enough to prompt the political philosopher-humanist to note in *The Prince* the persuasive power exerted by

fear of punishment. Despite the fact that the use of the rope hoist occurred mostly within a prison's walls, there is no doubt that those who never faced the gruesome ordeal knew of its agonies. Indeed, the very sight of the device was enough to engender dread and warn against transgressive behaviors or, as Machiavelli's case indicates, political missteps and ill-fated alliances. In this respect, the public display of the *corda* bears at least some comparison to the guillotines erected on the Place du Carrousel in front of the Tuileries in Paris and in city squares throughout France during the last decade of the eighteenth century. An appreciation by secular authorities of the visual impact on the populace of seeing implements of torture and execution undoubtedly explains the construction in 1468 of a gallows and rope hoist in the center of Ostiglia, some thirty kilometers southeast of Mantua. The exhibition of these foreboding devices was intended to deter acts of thievery and property damage.³¹ As *tavolette votive* began to plate the walls of thaumaturgic shrines, the cautionary message conveyed by the public display of these frightening instruments was underscored by graphic – and also publicly displayed – depictions of the rope hoist's horrors.

There are different ways to tell the same story, different moments on which to focus, and different details to include even when, as is the case with votive panel paintings, buyers embraced the familiar and artists favored the formulaic. *Tavolette* offered by or on behalf of survivors and sufferers of the *corda* illustrate the point. Invariably the accused is pictured hoisted well above the floor, arms twisted behind his or her back, which causes the head and torso to angle forward. At least one holy intercessor observes the torment from the heights of heaven. Beyond this, and as is demonstrated by nearly two dozen late sixteenth-century examples of the tortuous experience preserved at the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco, variables, such as the presence or number of inquisitors, distinguish one image from another. Although it conveys better than most what is next to occur, the *tavoletta votiva* offered jointly to the Madonna dell'Arco and the Madonna del Carmine by "Gio[v]ane Zayra di Nap(oli)" in 1599 is representative of the corpus (Plate 8). Standing, with one hand on his hip and the other gesturing toward the unfortunate Zayra, at whom he looks directly, one inquisitor poses a question. A seated colleague, his pen-holding hand at the ready, awaits the response. So, too, does a third man. This figure plays a critical role in communicating to viewers a sense of time unfolding. Like the questioner, he looks at Zayra, and like the interrogator set to record the victim's answers, he is poised to act. Holding the rope in place with his right hand, he bends slightly and reaches to untie it from the cleat with his left. An agonizing drop is imminent.

Giovanni Zayra's *tavoletta* – and the handful of others that include a figure at the ready to release the rope – is arguably among the most effective in conveying an impending action and reaction. Still, it has much in common

with other representations of this subject at this site. Typically, two interrogators are represented. As in Zayra's panel, one stands, while the other is shown seated at a table that is usually equipped with an inkwell and an hourglass to mark the allotted passage of time a prisoner was held aloft. What is missing from these other examples, and that which makes Zayra's *tavoletta* particularly successful in capturing the drama of imminence, is the all-important third man. Here, and as the monoscenic mode of narration dictates, the presented imagery stimulates the viewer's recognition of a familiar scenario. Admittedly, details beyond the immediate depicted moment are absent. There is no indication of the nature of the committed crime. Neither is there any information concerning the circumstances of arrest. To have included this information was, perhaps, beside the point. Certainly it was beyond the narrative scope dictated by a *tavoletta*'s function. Stories told by *tavolette* are tales of earthly experience and human endurance, testamentary accounts of dialogues with the divine, acts of intercession, suffering, and survival. What mattered was the endorsement of an efficacious intervention: a miracle. How Zayra or anyone else ended up in the hands of inquisitors and in need of the Virgin's help was an altogether different story.

Among the *corda tavolette* in the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco, only a few depart significantly from the presentation of the incident on Zayra's panel. Even the highly unusual painting that depicts two accused women adheres to the basic, monoscenic formula.³² Hoisted high above the floor, both, dressed in identical green shifts, are interrogated by a pair of inquisitors. In contrast to Zayra's *tavoletta*, the examiners in this panel are represented seated; yet, as is the case with Zayra's *tavoletta*, each has assumed a different duty prescribed by the task at hand. One asks questions; the other records the testimony. Among monoscenic narratives, only one of the paintings of this incident at this site focuses on a different moment in the proceedings. Instead of representing the gripping moment of interrogation and imminent drop, one "B. Francisco D. Paolo" had himself depicted when the agonizing ordeal was over.³³ Dated 1592, Francisco's panel shows him as a well-dressed man kneeling in prayer. Behind him, the rope of the *corda* hangs loosely from its tackle block. Interrogators are absent. Through the intercession of the Madonna dell'Arco, Francisco survived what others did not.

Francisco's *tavoletta* contrasts with one left by "Gio Thomaso di Paulo" for similar reasons three years later. Unlike the artist of Francisco D. Paolo's *tavoletta*, the painter responsible for making Tommaso's represented judicial interrogation in the double-time, or continuous, narrative mode. Although lacking a formal division, the spatially unified scene is nevertheless divided roughly in half with the sequence of events clearly unfolding from right to left. Unfortunately, the panel has suffered cracking and extensive loss of paint. Still, it is possible to read the image. Just right of center, an inquisitor sits at

a table scribbling notes. A second examiner stands next to his colleague, his body pivoted toward the suspended victim, who, like Giovanni Zayra, has been stripped to his undergarments. The inquisitor's pose, one hand pointing toward the transcript, the other toward the accused, suggests that an already posed question demands an answer. A subsequent moment in the narrative is represented on the panel's left. Now fully dressed in doublet and breeches but with ankles shackled, the votary kneels, holding his hat between hands clasped in prayer. An inscription explains, "Gio Thomaso di Paulo was condemned to death by the high court of the Vice-Regent, having the case appealed to the *Consiglio*, [the sentence] was commuted to eight years [in prison], I turn to the glorious Virgin Maria dell'Arco ... liberator as God and Virgin [15]95." Rather than convey a sequence of moments, the second of the two panels deviating from the standard monoscenic presentation of interrogation by *corda* suggests simultaneity. In this single-setting scene there are no inquisitors, despite the fact that the accused is suspended. In their stead, the tortured man's wife and two daughters, who could not possibly have been present during the questioning, direct their prayers of supplication to the Madonna dell'Arco, St. Anthony, and St. Gennaro.³⁴ Presumably, they implored the Madonna to intercede to end the suffering of their loved one as he underwent examination.

What held true at the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco was true at other thaumaturgic sites. Within parameters set by convention, painters and donors found ways to individualize experience. The three legible panels depicting interrogation by rope hoist at Lonigo's Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli demonstrate the point.³⁵ One, dated 1605 (Figure 51), resembles somewhat those dedicated to the Madonna dell'Arco. Two men struggle to hoist the victim off of the ground in the presence of a pair of examiners. Seemingly unable to bear the sight of horror, the Madonna dei Miracoli turns away from the scene unfolding below. A crenellated structure, reduced in scale, suggests that the event took place in a prison despite the sky-blue background. In a second panel (Figure 52), which was in all likelihood painted in the early seventeenth century, the scene is oddly set against a backdrop of distant mountains softened by atmospheric effects. Here, there are no examiners or familial supplicants. Only the two interlocutors in the devotional dialogue, the supplicant and the intercessor, are present. Inexplicably, the pulley of the hoist intrudes into the space from the upper-left edge of the pictorial space. The suspended man, pictured in profile, turns full face toward the viewer yet casts down his eyes. Despite the obvious physical stress of his position, he appears quietly introspective. His meditative calm is explained by the balancing and visionary *figura* of the Madonna dei Miracoli on the right. Rather than depict the intercessor among clouds, the painter of this *tavoletta* positioned the Madonna against the stylized fronds of a Tree of Life, a revisualization of the painting that animated when assaulted by brigands on April 30, 1486. The landscape is



51. Anonymous, interrogation by rope hoist, *tavoletta votiva*, incised with the date 1605. Tempera on panel. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: with kind permission of Santa Maria dei Miracoli)

no less distinctive than the unusual presentation of Mary. In the foreground, an outcropping of rock melds with a swath of dark green, suggestive of thick bushes. It gives way to a middle ground of pale green, which in turn is diffused by misty white from which rocky mountain peaks emerge. The overall visual effect is one that transforms the naturalism of atmospheric recession into a dreamlike landscape.

The third of Lonigo's *corda tavolette* is singular by reason of who is doing what (Figure 53). True to the conventional presentation of the event, the victim is pictured suspended. Indeed, he has been pulled as high as possible. But here, it seems, an accuser rather than an official interrogator holds the starring role in the dramatic proceedings. Dashingy outfitted, sword by his side, and with an assertive stance, the man positioned beneath the accused addresses the trio of solemnly attired inquisitors seated at the table. As is true of *tavolette* at other locations, this panel is stylistically site-specific, sharing hallmark characteristics with other paintings in the sanctuary's collection. Perhaps the most notable characteristic of Lonigo's *tavolette*, and one that is visible in this work, is the manner by which an interior space is defined. Walls are distinguished from one another and differentiated from the floor and ceiling by unmodulated blocks of color. One wall might be red, another gray, a third white, black, ochre, and so forth.



52. Anonymous, votary on rope hoist, *tavoletta votiva*, early seventeenth century (?). Tempera on panel. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: author)

As is the case at Lonigo and Naples, the collection of *tavolette* at Cesena's Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte exhibits stylistic affinity among groups of panels of disparate as well as like themes indicating the presence of local workshops. While not as obvious as some examples, the two representations of interrogation by rope hoist suggest a shared (shop) if not identical (artist) origin. Although one panel was painted in tempera and the other in oil, and while the former is more rudimentary than the latter, relying solely on line to define form, similarities suggest a reliance on a stock figure circulating within the same *bottega*.³⁶ In both panels the victim is pictured with his ankles shackled and, more significantly, with a distinctive backward twist of the arms. The qualitative difference between these panels is possibly explained by the extremely rare coat of arms that functions in lieu of an inscription on the more descriptive of the two (Figure 54).³⁷ It indicates perhaps the ability of this votary to purchase a *tavoletta* painted in oil (a distinction in itself) by a more skilled hand. In light of the determinate role social rank could play in the meting out of torture, this heraldic device might also explain differences in pictorial content.



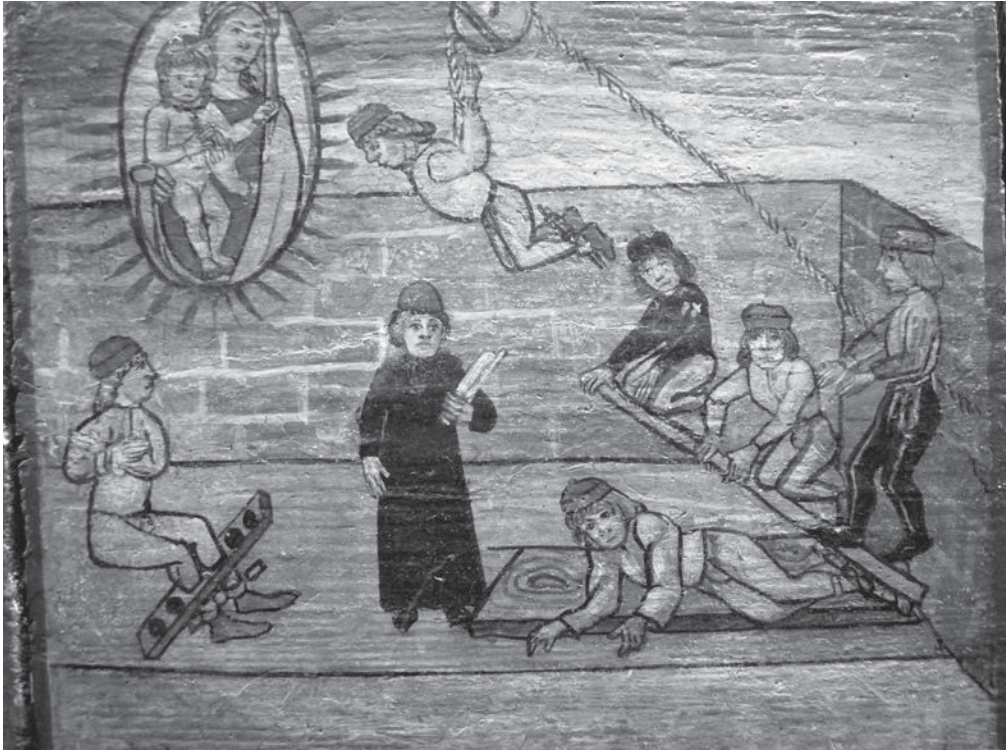
53. Anonymous, interrogation by rope hoist, *tavoletta votiva*, late sixteenth to early seventeenth century. Tempera on panel. Lonigo, Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli. (Photo: with kind permission of Santa Maria dei Miracoli)

The scene with the prominently displayed signifying device pictures a single, stative moment in the trial of the accused: interrogation by rope hoist. The votary responsible for the donation of the other and less proficiently painted scene was not as fortunate (Figure 55). Although this *tavoletta* lacks an inscription and fails to suggest a temporal sequence for what transpired, there is no doubt about what happened. Minimal as it may be, this panel presents us with a single-setting, triple-time narrative. Within a pictorial space defined as an enclosure by the high brick wall, the protagonist is subjected to not one but three forms of torture. At left he is pictured immobilized by stocks (*berlina*), at center we see him suspended from the rope hoist under which stands the interrogator, and at right he is depicted enduring the crushing of his feet and ankles by the *stranghetta*, a type of vise that is here applied with particular severity. No less than three torturers, one standing and two pictured kneeling, combine their weights to compress the plank.



54. Anonymous, interrogation by rope hoist, *tavoletta votiva*, early sixteenth century. Oil on panel. Cesena, Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte. (Photo: Paul W. Jacobs, II)

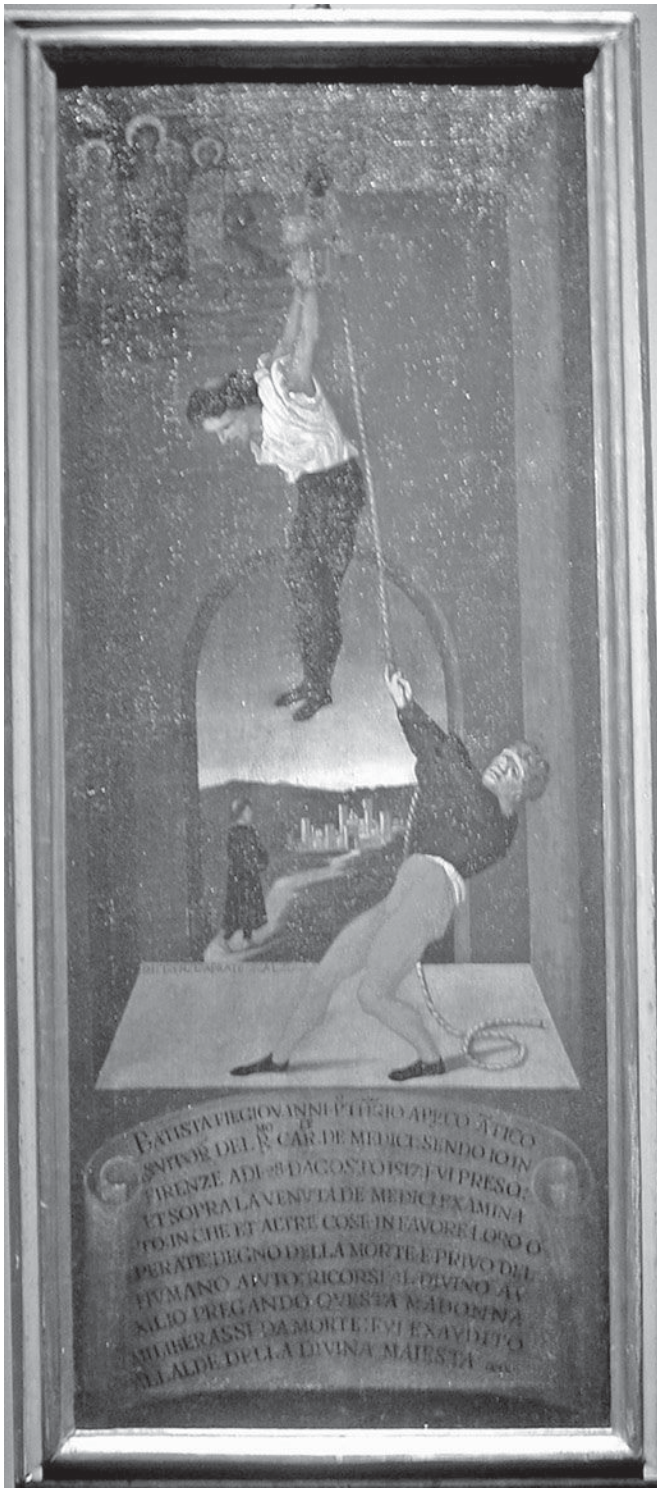
A final example of the polyscenic mode of narration is the ex-voto donated in 1517 to the Madonna delle Carceri of Prato by Giovan Battista Figiovanni (Figure 56). Before considering the painting, it must be admitted that Figiovanni's panel does not fit easily under the rubric "*tavoletta*." Several times larger than the norm, it is distinguished by size and its unusual – but not unique – vertical format. Above all, it is distinctive by reason of its compositional complexity and stylistic quality. Yet, despite these atypical aspects, Figiovanni's ex-voto does not fit comfortably among votive paintings either. Votive paintings offered by a community often represent a panoramic scene of battle, as exemplified by a painting in the Shrine of Monte Castello high above Lake Garda in Tignale; or a *sacra conversazione*, such as the canvas painted by Bernardino Lanino and offered to the Madonna of Oropa (Piedmont) by the town of Biella following the cessation of the plague in 1522; or, as suggested by a passage in Paolo Morigia's description of *una tavola* at Caravaggio and evinced by a panel in Cesena, a representation of a communal procession of thanksgiving.³⁸ By contrast, votive paintings offered by individuals that are not *tavolette* – miracle books tend to distinguish them as *tavole* – typically portray only the venerated intercessor. For example, in 1508 Antonio de Mena,



55. Anonymous, votary enduring three forms of torture, *tavoletta votiva*, early sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Cesena, Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte. (Photo: author)

having had painted a figure of the Virgin (*de farli depingere la figura della gloriosa Vergine Maria*), traveled more than seven hundred kilometers north from Rome to Tirano, where he deposited the painting in gratitude for his son's recovery from plague.³⁹ Large-scale scenes depicting the votary's experience – the actual event that prompted the call for intercession – are exceedingly rare. Figiovanni's *voto* is one such example.

At the time of the painting's donation, political mistakes were easily made in the contentious climate of Florence. Giovan Battista Figiovanni, then canon of San Lorenzo, made one and, like Machiavelli only a few years before, found himself suspended from the rope hoist in the Bargello. Like Machiavelli, he survived interrogation. His ex-voto records two stages of the ordeal or, rather, two moments in the story that explain the painting's *raison d'être*. In the picture's foreground, Figiovanni is seen in the process of being hoisted by a torturer, who strains with the exertions of the gruesome task.⁴⁰ Interrogators are conspicuously absent, leaving room for a secondary scene. Visible through an arched opening, the interior space opens to reveal the readily recognizable vista: Prato's walls and skyline. The barefoot canon of San Lorenzo, small in the distance, is visible as he makes his way along a dusty road from Florence to



56. Giovan Battista Figiovanni's votive painting, 1517. Oil on panel. Prato, Church of Santa Maria delle Carceri. (Photo: author)

offer thanks to the Madonna delle Carceri. Here, as in Tommaso Inghirami's *tavoletta*, spatial distance is used to convey temporal sequence.

As Figiovanni's *tavola* and Inghirami's *tavoletta* illustrate, a visual account of an incident does not need to relate an event as a systematically ordered sequence in order to communicate what happened. Viewers were and are capable of adding up the compositional parts to make a comprehensible whole. Yet some painters of *tavolette* – admittedly they are few in number – did tell a story precisely in this way, choosing to present the unfolding of episodic time as a temporally ordered linear narrative. Referred to as strip narratives, narratives of this kind present two or more moments of an episode within framed spaces. This mode of narration, which has been called the “ancestor” to the modern comic strip, began to appear in Europe during the second half of the fifteenth century.⁴¹ To be sure, there were series of paintings, sculptures, illuminations, and prints suggesting the passage of time – the Four Seasons, the Twelve Months, Ages of Man, and so forth – but in contrast to a linear narrative, which implies a contiguous sequence of events with a beginning and an end, a serial representation of months and seasons is “essentially static and circular.”⁴² There is no before or after, no bracketing of one incident by others to suggest contingency. The handful of *tavolette* utilizing the narrative strip format is not compositionally sophisticated. Indeed, while there are separate frames devoted to the moments before and after intercession, there is, to my knowledge, no *tavoletta* divided into three or more framed scenes illustrating, to paraphrase Gerald Prince, a first event preceding in time a second that both precedes and explains the cause of a third.⁴³ Still, the sense of a narrative, defined as a story revolving around actions occurring in space and unfolding in time, is present.

Although rudely rendered, a panel at Cesena donated by an unnamed votary demonstrates the point (Figure 57). Formatted horizontally and divided into two framed scenes, the represented episode reads sequentially from left to right. Here, the “coherence” of the “story,” the specific way the artist expressed the “connectedness” of moments within the episode, is conveyed graphically.⁴⁴ In the left frame, a floundering figure dressed in red is barely discernible beneath the waters of a rushing river. Represented in a mandorla of light in the upper-left corner, the Madonna del Monte, her head turned to her right and seeming to look beyond the pictured space, appears oblivious to the life-threatening event taking place in the torrential waters below her. In the subsequent frame, Mary redirects her gaze to earth. The figure in the red dress, now clearly visible, is prostrate but safe on the riverbank. The change in Mary's focus from one of inattention in scene one to mindfulness in scene two, visualizes her readiness to assist those who solicit her help, underscoring the accuracy of her many descriptive titles: *Consolatrice de' tribulati*, *Protegitrice fedelissima*, and *Avvocata de' Popoli*, and communicating the moral significance of the *tavoletta*: faith.



57. Anonymous, rescue from drowning, *tavoletta votiva*, sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Cesena, Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte. (Photo: author)

Although it is difficult to determine the type of architectural structure painted on the right, its inclusion in a composition that is otherwise void of detail suggests its importance. It is reasonable to assume that it represents or references the shrine that at one time housed the polychrome statue of the Madonna del Monte or, alternatively, the basilica that became her home in 1318.

NARRATIVES BEYOND THE FRAME

Whether they captured the drama of impending crisis or visualized its resolution with a scene of prayerful thanksgiving, *tavolette*, or rather the pictures painted on them, are associated with individual experiences and past occurrences. By contrast, these same *tavolette*, when viewed as votive objects, have a meaningful existence in the present that extends into the future by implication. In other words, the image is related to a prior plea for help whereas the object acknowledges an intercessor's efficacy in perpetuity. Like all ex-votos, votive panels conveyed implicitly a sequence of unfolding events that occurred in the wake of the depicted incident. The solicited saint answered a prayer. Hence, a ship did not founder, a child was pulled safely from the depths of a well, a man stricken with plague survived (Figure 58) as did a woman from the complicated circumstances of a breech birth (Figures 42 and 46). In receipt of grace (*per grazia ricevuta*), the *miracolato* traveled to the shrine of his intercessor in fulfillment of a vow, attended Mass, recited prayers on perseverance and devotion, and perhaps lit a candle and dropped a *scudo* or *lira* into the alms box before departing the sanctuary for the journey home. Through this familiar sequence, the story told by the *tavoletta*-as-picture was brought full circle by the *tavoletta*-as-object, a process that allowed a votive panel painting to communicate its own reason for being.⁴⁵ But a *tavoletta*'s story did not end with an explanation



58. Anonymous, plague survivor in prayer, *tavoletta votiva*, late fifteenth century. Tempera on panel. Loreto, Museo Antico Tesoro della Santa Casa. (Photo: author with kind permission of the Archivio Storico della Santa Casa)

of the circumstances that led to its making and offering. Instead, the depicted story became a contributing part of another story. With the votary's fulfillment of a promise and departure from the sacred site – acts that essentially ended his or her physical involvement with the offered object – attention shifted away from the object's donor to its recipient. The depicted event still referenced a traumatic incident in the donor's life; however, now existing in the company of other paintings, it joined with other votive pictures to create a postmortem *vita* of the intercessor it referenced and whose image it framed. In this way, that is within the full expanse of the votive context, the narratives of *tavolette* were intrasequential and intersequential.

Following his mid-fifteenth-century visit to Loreto and after surveying the ex-votos that “nearly fill the entire basilica” dedicated to the eponymous Madonna, Flavio Biondo concluded that the accretion “provides the most striking evidence that God listens to the prayers of suppliants through intercession of his Mother.” A century later, *tavolette*, many featuring graphic illustrations of resolved crises, would appear in confirmation of this assessment. Other pilgrims made similar assertions at other thaumaturgic sites throughout Italy. The addition of *tavolette* must have made the effect of these votive assemblages all the more compelling since pictures, in contrast to things, cannot be divorced from the intercessor whose efficacy they avow. Shackles, crutches, bits of clothing, anchors, and other popularly deposited objects carried testamentary

weight of the miraculous so long as they were exhibited in associative proximity to the agentic source, whether it be a relic or, to quote from Paleotti's *Discorso*, a sacred image through which "God has performed manifest signs and miracles."⁴⁶ Once these things were removed from a sacred setting and distanced from the thaumaturge to whom they were offered, there was no sure way to determine whether they were intended to perform a utilitarian function or meant to signify the miraculous. How, for example, was a rather ordinary length of rope to be seen? Was it to be understood as something used to hang a man or, because of frayed, torn ends, a sign of salvation from an unjust conviction? Offerings of livestock and agricultural products were even more problematical in this regard. In cases of both a utilitarian object and farm stock, a clear understanding of the redirected use of an object – its functional shift from the practical to the devotionally significant – relied on an external source or context to clarify its meaning. Something – a nearby relic or miracle-working image, an inventory, the presence of a votary acknowledging their receipt of grace – was needed to explain the implications of these things.

The same cannot be said of *tavolette*. Because the solicited saint and pious petitioner were always represented, there was no uncertainty concerning a panel's purpose, no ambiguity regarding who had been invoked and, therefore, who was being thanked for extending help at a critical moment in time. This point is demonstrated by the *tavoletta* dedicated to the Madonna of Loreto that somehow made its way to Lonigo's Sanctuary of the Madonna dei Miracoli (Figure 15). Distancing the panel from the site of the intercessor's shrine did not cast into doubt the intercessor's identity. The representation of Mary with the Holy House of Nazareth leaves nothing in question. Still, it was the on-site narrative effect of accumulated *tavolette* that spoke most eloquently to an intercessor's readiness to come to the aid of supplicants. Filling the space around a holy relic or sacred image, *tavolette* can be seen to coalesce into a *vita dei miracoli*, an illustrated life of miracles. Although *vite* of this kind were created over time and configured by the happenstance of donor preference and affected by custodial prerogative – a votary's decision to purchase a *tavoletta* rather than some other form of votive offering combined with an individual's or a prior's positioning of a votive picture within the sanctuary, indeed the latter's determination to preserve a panel or discard it – the capacity of *tavolette* to collectively tell a story was no less than that of thoughtfully planned decorative programs composed of paintings commissioned from established masters. In fact, decades before *tavolette votive* began to accumulate in significant numbers, the custodians of holy relics and sacred images recognized the promotional potential of narrative cycles. If authenticity and efficacy were established through visible signs and tangible example, then surely a representation of intervention was more effective than a ship's anchor or a plait of hair, or so reasoned, for example, the *confratelli* of Venice's Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista.⁴⁷ With devotees



59. Gentile Bellini, *Procession in the Piazza San Marco*, detail, 1496. Oil on Canvas. Venice, Accademia. (Photo: Camerafoto Arte Venice/Art Resource, New York)

continuously arriving at their meeting place, the confraternity sought the city's best talents to narrate the history of the prized relic in its possession: a much venerated fragment of the True Cross. Among the painters charged with “documenting [the relic’s] past acts of power” was Gentile Bellini (ca. 1429–1507).⁴⁸

In the profusion of details Bellini included in his contribution to the project, *Procession in the Piazza San Marco* of 1496 (Figure 59), it is easy to overlook the private act of devotion taking place in the central foreground. With the Piazza San Marco as the backdrop, the *confratelli* of the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista in solemn attendance, and a host of spectators focused on the venerated relic, “a particle of the most sacred wood of the cross,” Jacopo de’ Salis drops to his knees. A Brescian merchant “of good reputation,” De’ Salis had received word that his son had suffered a grievous skull fracture.⁴⁹ With his child’s life in the balance, the desperate father kneels in hopeful supplication as the relic of the *sanctissima croce* passes before him. Upon returning home several days later, De’ Salis learned that his faith was well founded. His prayer

had been heard and divine favor granted. Miraculously, his son was restored to health “without a blemish.” His recovery happened on the very day after (April 26) De’ Salis had tendered his plea. In gratitude for the interventional grace his son received and in accordance with devotional practice, De’ Salis returned to Venice with his child to pay due reverence to the efficacious fragment of the True Cross.

Bellini’s *Procession in Piazza San Marco*, a painting in which the “votive moment” is said to form “the symbolic core of the narrative,” is but one of several monumental canvases commissioned by the Scuola Grande for the Sala della Croce, the room in which the confraternity kept its prized relic. Viewed together, these images bear comparison with the ensemble of tomb, statue, fresco cycle, and ex-votos seen by pilgrims entering the Grand Chapel of San Nicola da Tolentino discussed in the preceding chapter. In fact, it can be compared to the image and object groupings in most thaumaturgic shrines. In concert with one another and in relationship to the venerated splinter of the True Cross, the paintings in the Sala della Croce perform the double task of “authenticat[ing] the relic by documenting its past” and constructing a narrative of sanctity by asserting its efficacy “with all the unchallengeable certainty of a notarial act.”⁵⁰ Lazzaro Bastiani painted the donation in 1369 of the holy fragment. Others, including Bellini, Giovanni Mansueti, Benedetto di Diana, and Vittore Carpaccio visualized the relic’s prodigious authenticity with works portraying various miracles recorded in the Scuola’s miracle book: the healings of the daughters of Ser Benvegnudo of San Polo and Pietro de’ Ludovico and the miracles at the bridges of San Lorenzo and San Lio. Although at least five different artists contributed paintings to the series, the visual effect of the whole is unified through an “adherence to a common ‘eyewitness’ style,” a shared figural scale and chromatic range predominated by reds, ochres, golds, and other warmer colors, as well as a general consistency in compositional structure.⁵¹ Yet these shared elements do not privilege aesthetic unity over historical accuracy, “the total effect of archival completeness” that was essential to documenting a true history of the relic. In the words of Patricia Fortini Brown, the unity and comprehensiveness of visual qualities combine to present the miraculous as events that are “as irrefutably true as everyday life.”⁵² Here, then, miracle and narrative are perfectly paired: the former presented, according to Brown, as “true of everyday life,” the latter being, as Roland Barthes observed to be characteristic of all narrative, a basic component of “life itself.”

Although one rarely stumbles upon a thaumaturgic shrine with its walls still plated and floors littered by votive offerings, it is not unusual to see throughout Italy a statue of a saint set on a pedestal heaped high with notes of supplication or the base of a sculptural grouping of the Madonna and Christ Child, such as Sansovino’s *Madonna del Parto*, papered with photographs (Figure 6). Not unlike the narrative paintings that once hung in the Sala della Croce of

the *albergo* of the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista, these notes and photographs advance the miraculous “as irrefutably true as everyday life,” but unlike the canvases of Bellini, Mansueti, and others, these missives and photographs do not come together to create a *vita dei miracoli* any more than did the ever-mounting piles of chains, ropes, braids, candles, and other *voti* in centuries past. However, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, *vite* had been structured in some thaumaturgic sanctuaries. At Cesena, Lonigo, Tirano, and other places, Marian life cycles merged with *tavolette* to present visitors with a pictorial “life” that was rooted in the historical past, continued in the present, and projected into the future. Because dozens of *tavolette* dating from the eighteenth century to the present remain within the apse, the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte provides the clearest understanding of how this conflation of images worked to impart its message.

The sanctuary crowning a hill overlooking Cesena had not always been dedicated to the Virgin Mary. At the beginning of the eleventh century, a mortuary shrine honoring the city’s revered and subsequently canonized archbishop, St. Mauro (died ca. 946), stood on the site attended by a small Benedictine community.⁵³ Although reported miracles brought devotees to Mount Spaziano – and prompted the renaming of the hill Mount Mauro – pilgrims increasingly shifted their attentions from the archbishop’s modest sepulcher (its edges chipped by devotees who prophylactically ingested its crushed marble dust) to an even more modest *aedicula* protecting a polychrome statue, approximately one meter tall, of the Virgin Mary that stood about midway up the long and wending stairway leading to the hill’s summit. Responding in 1318 to this change in devotional focus, the bishop ordered the statue transferred to the small church where St. Mauro had once passed hours in meditative silence. During the following century, Cesena’s bishop all but disappeared from popular memory as the Madonna del Monte garnered the reverential notice of an ever-larger number of devotees. To accommodate visitors and a growing number of brothers, the monastic complex, as well as the church housing the centrally positioned polychrome statue of the Madonna, was expanded to its present-day size. With the conclusion of the building campaign in 1548, attention turned to the task of embellishing the basilica’s interior.⁵⁴ Girolamo Longhi’s narrative frieze relating the life of the Virgin, completed in 1559, was among the first projects to be realized.

Comprising fourteen episodes from the life of the Madonna, Longhi’s frieze begins at the southeast corner of the nave with Mary’s miraculous birth. It then wraps around the expansive basilica interior with scenes of chronologically sequenced events relating to the miraculous incarnation of Christ, the Holy Family’s flight into Egypt, the Miracle at Cana, and other signal moments in the Virgin’s life on earth. With Longhi’s depiction of Mary’s Assumption into heaven, the cycle ends across the nave from

where it began. Although Giovanbattista Razzani's fresco of the *Coronation of the Virgin* in the vault of the apse as well as Giuseppe Milani da Parma's *Assumption of the Virgin* in the central dome would not be painted until, respectively, 1640 and 1792, the basilica was by the advent of the seventeenth century filled with dozens if not hundreds of other images celebrating the Madonna. Today, these early images are safely locked in vitrines located in the sacristy and are thus hidden from the view of casual church visitors, but dozens of others – votive pictures that by and large date from the eighteenth century to the present – are either displayed in glass cases or hang on the pilasters and walls of the ambulatory that curves behind the altar and the statue of the abbey's titular saint. It takes little imagination to substitute the exhibited pictures of motorcycle crashes drawn in crayon, bombs laying waste to Bosnia sketched in ink, and operating room scenes painted in fluorescent acrylic with the older, sequestered *tavolette votive* that represent ships caught in storms, interrogations of prisoners suspended from the rope hoist, a farmer struck down by an oxcart, a man attacked by a wolf, soldiers engaged in combat, mothers cradling infants, the possessed purged of demons, symptomatically graphic depictions of the ill, and other life-threatening crises as well as supplicants in prayer. It is also possible to envision in the mind's eye the scene confronted by late sixteenth-century pilgrims to Mount Mauro and, thus, come to an appreciative understanding of how this ensemble of images – the Marian life cycle girdling the nave; hundreds of votive panels filling the apse; and, holding the central position, the polychrome statue of the Madonna del Monte – functioned in aggregate as an open-ended *vita*. The fourteen episodes depicted in Girolamo Longhi's frieze recounted a life on earth. Chronicling a life of miracles after death, the many *tavolette* picked up the story where Longhi's narrative ended: with Mary's ascension into heaven. Physically positioned between this double *vita*, the polychrome statue stood as a *figura*, the visible connective link between two realms, earth and heaven, and indeed between two persons: the mother of Jesus living in the biblical past and the Queen of Heaven who has and continues to intercede with God on humanity's behalf. Here, through images, the miraculous and the everyday merged to underscore Mary's *praesentia*.

As a complex of interrelated images – an effigy, or *eikōn*, framed by narratives recounting Mary's life on earth and her affecting presence in death – the interior of the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte functioned much like a *vita* icon. There are, to be sure, notable differences between a spatial construct and a planar composition. Nonetheless, the components in both are the same. Moreover, their message was shared. The St. Margaret Altarpiece, now in the Vatican, illustrates the point (Figure 11). The eight vignettes relating the life of Margaret, whose iconic image they frame, can be broken down into three chronologically distinct states of being. The first five tell the story of Margaret's

life on earth: her struggle to remain chaste and her wrongful imprisonment, her appeal to God and His reply in the form of an annunciating dove, and finally her physical torment. The next two episodes represent the saint in transition between physical life in this world and spiritual life in the next. Thus, in scene six Margaret, immersed in a vat of boiling water, lives her last moments on earth. The finality of this stage of her existence is underscored in the next scene. Here (Figure 11), her body lies lifeless, her severed head bleeding in the foreground. Unquestionably dead, Margaret nonetheless remains spiritually and effectively present. In the eighth and last vignette, she now rests unseen in her sepulcher. Although not visibly present, the martyred saint possesses a vital presence that at once refers to the *praesentia* documented by her *eikōn* and the *potentia* of her relics avowed by the pilgrims gathered around her tomb and the testaments to her postmortem interventions suspended from a tie rod above it – *immagini* of arms, heads, hands, breasts, and thighs. While parallels between Margaret's *vita* icon and the interconnected collection of images in Cesena's Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte seem clear, those between the basilica's interior and the woodcut of St. Roch, cut after a design by Titian, are arguably more compelling (Figure 40).

"Conceived as an altarpiece with a central monumental panel of St. Roch ... and a surrounding architectural frame" that includes a supportive predella, the woodcut issued by Venice's Scuola di San Rocco around 1524 has much in common with the St. Margaret panel painted more than one hundred years earlier.⁵⁵ Like the narrative that begins at the lower left and moves clockwise to conclude at the bottom right in a life cycle that functions as a frame for the front-facing and full-standing figure of St. Margaret filling the core space of the great, gabled *vita* icon, the broadsheet relates the life of the dynamically posed Roch in eight similarly configured vignettes. Unlike the painter of Margaret's altarpiece, but in accordance with a large number of other *vita* retables, Titian chose to end his narrative with a death scene. This is not to say that he did not represent Roch's miraculous life-in-death, but rather to argue that he conveyed the saint's postmortem efficacy by other inventive means. Positioned conspicuously atop the fictive predella is a small box inscribed *limosina/ per la fabbrica*, an obvious plea for monetary donations to be used for the construction of a meeting hall for the Scuola di San Rocco. Significantly, the alms collection box is balanced compositionally by a votive head that looks much the same as three of the *immagini* pictured hanging above Margaret's tomb. In addition to this votive head is a *tavoletta votiva*. Represented as an autonomous image left leaning against the frame of a larger image, it illustrates all that the inscription on the fictive predella promises, exhorting the pious to demonstrate their devotion to Roch in order that he, in turn, will provide them with protection from the plague. Not surprisingly, the woodcut has been described as "an important document of popular piety in Renaissance Venice," a city in

which the plague saint's cult was strong and outbreaks of the contagious and deadly pestilence were recurrent.⁵⁶

Factual detail, "never a major concern of saintly biographers," is especially elusive in the anonymous and undated *Acta Breviora* promoting the cult of St. Roch and the subsequently written *Vita Sancti Rochi* penned by the Venetian governor of Brescia as he witnessed an outbreak of plague that, in 1477–79, ravaged the city he administered.⁵⁷ Structured "almost entirely on hagiographic *topoi*," the life related in these texts traces an ahistorical (or suprahistorical) journey from privileged youth through pilgrimage and pious ministration, to poverty, unjust imprisonment, and death. It ends, ultimately, with the discovery and identification of a body distinguished by an aura of sanctity avowing Roch's status as one of God's chosen representatives.⁵⁸ Because it was so evidently a hagiographic construct, Roch's life and miracles were viewed as questionable by Pope Sixtus V (1520–90), who reportedly was "strong in his opinion either to canonize [Roch] or else to remove him from the ranks of saints."⁵⁹ By the time the warning was sounded in 1590, Rome could not go against the popular current of Venetian belief. Devotees of Roch were numerous, and both his popularity and history within the city well documented. The broadsheet issued by the Scuola di San Rocco, established in 1478 with the mission to tend to the poor and sick, was a part of that history.

In 1481 Roch's name was added to the Venetian edition of the Roman missal. Four years later, his relics were received into the city. Between 1489 and 1509, a church was constructed to house the holy man's remains. On March 15, 1517, the cornerstone for the adjacent Scuola di San Rocco was laid. Proceeds from the purchase of the woodcut were undoubtedly directed to the building project, which, following a lull, was by this date again underway. Whether moneys were used solely to fund the raising of the confraternity's meeting place or, perhaps additionally, utilized to finance the Scuola's expanding musical program, the print promoted the cult of St. Roch in an especially pointed way, for like the array of images in Cesena's Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte – those painted by Longhi *and* those on hundreds of *tavolette* produced by anonymous hands – it narrated a past life that extended into the present by referencing Roch's intercessory efficacy. As in the sanctuary at Cesena, it did so, albeit illusionistically rather than physically, within and beyond the graphically depicted frame bounding the *eikōn*, or portrait, of the rapturous Roch.

The sixteenth-century proliferation of printed hagiographic imagery indicates recognition of the promotional value of reproductive *imagini con miracoli* by guardians of thaumaturgic shrines and by devotees of *Beati moderni* like Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) and Filippo Neri (1515–95), the respective founders of the Jesuit and Oratorian orders.⁶⁰ Clearly, these portable and inexpensive images were valued as an effective means of advertising a newly established sacred site or spreading the *fama sanctitatis* of a would-be saint. Equally clear

was the concern they generated among church officials who not only understood well the dangers of losing control over popular belief but also recognized the role images played in directing devotional practices. Thus, in an attempt to impose censorial regulation on sacred images, Pope Clement VIII (pontificate 1592–1605) issued in 1593 *Editto per gli altari et pitture*. *Editto* was followed by *Dubia de beatis non canonizatis a S.mo D.N. Formate*, issued in 1602. Among other edicts set forth in *Dubia de beatis* was the interdiction of “the votaries’ right to genuflect at the tombs of the blessed [*Beati moderni*] who are not canonized, to venerate and invoke them.”⁶¹ Although the Virgin Mary, as a holy personage with long-established and unassailable sanctity, was immune to such a prohibition, shrines dedicated to her, specifically those more recently founded and centered on miracle-working images as well as sanctuaries built on sites of proclaimed apparitional visitations, were not. Both not only aroused the ardent adoration of the faithful but also provoked questions from skeptics. The latter were justified, particularly with respect to stories of gullibility and image transfigurations. Ribald tales of image animation embedded in *novelle* circulated in the second half of the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth century, these multiplied with the addition of equally coarse yarns in *burla* and *facezia*.⁶²

However amusing these ludic fictions might seem, they were rooted in the sobriety of fact. Reports of malevolent exploitation of the fallibility of human perception were no less current than fabricated stories of deception and derision. Among the more notorious was one related in the voluminous martyrology of John Foxe (1516–87).

[As a result of the] dissension between the Dominic friars and the Franciscans ... certain of the Dominics, thinking by subtle sleight to work in the people’s heads that which they durst not achieve with open preaching, devised a certain image of the Virgin so artificially wrought, that the friars, by privy gins, made it to stir, and to make gestures, to lament, to complain, to weep, to groan, to give answers to them that asked; inso-much that the people therewith were brought in a marvelous persuasion, till at length the fraud being espied, the friars were taken, condemned, and burnt at Berne, in the year [1509].⁶³

Although the 1563 publication of Foxe’s book – with subsequent editions issued in 1570, 1576, and 1583 – coincided with deliberations by the Council of Trent and may be seen as contributing to consequent efforts by the Catholic Church to clarify its directives concerning the honoring of images and veneration of relics, steps earlier had been taken to halt any and all unauthorized promotion of a sacred site. The objective was to rein in popular devotionism. For example, striving to restore discipline to the clergy and rid Brescia of false beliefs, Giovanni Pietro Ferretti (1482–1557), suffragan to the bishop, ordered the republication in 1545 of *Constitutiones et edicta observanda in sancta brixienſi ecclesia*, a text that expressly forbid “everyone,” whether laity or clergy, to grant

permission to build any chapel or oratory “with the excuse of miracles.”⁶⁴ In a related move, the Holy Office of Venice convened in 1584 to evaluate claims concerning the purported animation and agency of a marble statue of the Madonna that had caused the space in front of Murano’s Convent of San Bernardo to be crowded with supplicants seeking miraculous cures and filled with ex-votos left by those whose health had been restored already.

The attempt by authorities to control activities around a miracle-working image was by no means limited to the incident at San Bernardo. Similar efforts were undertaken across Italy. Twelve years after the Holy Office of Venice adjudicated the case of the Madonna of San Bernardo, physicians were summoned by Naples’s vicar-general to appear before the archbishop to consider claims of miraculous healings associated with the image of the Madonna in the shrine of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Their opinion, which went against popular perception, caused the shrine to be closed except for religious services. It also resulted in the clearing away of all ex-votos. Fearing the shrine was to be permanently closed and its efficacious image removed, devotees staged an angry demonstration. In response to public outcry, religious authorities decided it best to drop their investigation.⁶⁵ In Rome that same year, 1596, similar pietistic fervor was focused on an image of the Madonna in Sant’Andrea della Fratte, which was seen to sweat and popularly professed to perform miracles. Unlike the decision reached by the Holy Office of Venice, which ultimately sanctioned the veneration of the Madonna at San Bernardo but placed it securely under official purview, and in contrast to the strategic retreat by the archbishop of Naples, Roman authorities ordered the image covered with boards, at least until it could be firmly established that it was, in fact, miraculous. Yet here, too, censorial measures failed. In fact, an *avviso* dated December 4, 1596, recorded that the covering of the image only “contributed to the peoples’ belief in what could not be seen.” Crowds continued to gather around the boarded image.⁶⁶

Many of the promotional prints that began to be issued by Marian shrines in the final years of the sixteenth century tap into the devotionism attested by the undaunted multitude visiting Sant’Andrea della Fratte. Compositionally, some surround the central image of the thaumaturgic Madonna with symbols referencing the designation of the Virgin Mary as, for example, heaven’s gateway, the Tower of David, the safe harbor, and the spotless mirror. Others, in keeping with monumental paintings like Prospero Fontana’s *Mystery of the Rosary Altarpiece* of 1570 fill the framing vignettes with theologically thematic images.⁶⁷ Still others are site specific. Eschewing scenes from Mary’s biblical life and drawing on the format and imagery of donated *tavolette votive* narrating postmortem acts of intercession, this last group advanced the Virgin’s *vita* beyond her life on earth, but it did so in a very site-specific manner. Because the central depiction is readily identifiable as a definite manifestation of the Madonna, representing her in the recognizable guise of either a

miracle-working image or an apparition as described by witnesses, prints of this kind unquestionably tie a print's perimeter scenes of miraculous cures and rescues to a particular place. Without doubt these pictures served a devotional function, but for the sanctuaries issuing them, these prints offered the practical benefit of monetary gain. The example of Titian's woodcut of St. Roch in the Albertina, for example, has been hand-colored and cut-down to eliminate the lateral scenes, additions and eliminations that rendered the popular print a viable substitute for a devotional painting, which, in all likelihood, was something its purchaser could not afford.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding this function, these inexpensive and easily had prints were more specifically tokens of remembrance, images of a visited place that vacillated between a metonymic object and the metaphorical collection. Indeed, like the modern souvenir postcard, they present a "culturally articulated site" through a combination of image and caption that prompts a recalled experience and the story behind it.⁶⁹ Consistently, the popular prints celebrating the Madonna of Tirano, known especially for her efficacy in resuscitating dead infants, illustrate this point (Figure 60).

It is a well-known fact that the mortality rates for both mother and child were high in the sixteenth century. It is also an established fact that the temporary resuscitation of stillborn infants or those who died soon after birth appears with pointed and poignant frequency in canonization records as well as in hagiographies. Reviving a dead child just long enough for the rite of baptism to be performed was, it seems, one of the more powerful proofs of holiness offered in support of a candidate's sanctity. Bonaventure's life of St. Francis (1181/82–1226) includes eight miracles involving children. Five are resuscitations. The *processus* of Nicholas of Tolentino includes several, as do the supporting documents submitted to the Rota on behalf of Gregory X some three hundred years later.⁷⁰ Resuscitation was also the principal miracle attributed to the Madonna of Tirano in the decade following her visitation to Mariolo Homodei on September 29, 1504. Of the seventy-four miracles recorded in the sanctuary's miracle book, twenty-one, or 28 percent, report the phenomenon of dead infants, many having been carried a great distance to the site by grieving parents, miraculously sighing, tearing, blushing, opening their eyes, and exhibiting other signs of life. The reoccurrence of the miracle was so frequent that the incident was among the first to be represented in the church, appearing in a work attributed to Cipriano Valorsa that is located in the central nave and dated 1576. In 1801–2, Gabriele Longhi would devote two of the relief panels on the great marble altar in the Chapel of the Apparition that is directly adjacent to Cipriano Valorsa's painting to the same theme. Although the earliest *tavolette* preserved at Tirano date to the eighteenth century, an embossed silver plaque measuring 19 by 28 centimeters that probably dates to the early seventeenth century suggests the miracle also appeared on votive images. Certainly, it is the most emphasized act of intercession depicted on popular engravings



60. Broadsheet, Madonna of Tirano, late seventeenth century. Hand-colored engraving. Private Collection. (Photo: author)

issued by the shrine during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, frequently figuring more than once among the vignettes framing the central image of Tirano's Madonna (Figure 19).

As in the great basilica dedicated to the Madonna del Monte of Cesena, the Sanctuary of the Madonna of Tirano was by the beginning of the seventeenth century a space filled with images visualizing a double, or extended, *vita*. Three of the five monumental paintings in the apse are of key moments in Mary's life on earth – her birth, presentation, and the Annunciation. The remaining two visualize her move from this world (the Assumption) to the next (her Coronation). In her new and eternal role as the Queen of Heaven, she assumed the role of *Mediatrice*, becoming the efficacious link between God and humanity. Cipriano Valorsa's canvas hanging in the sanctuary's nave as well as an assemblage of ex-votos, which according to the shrine's *libro dei miracoli* included painted panels as well as embossed plaques, narrated Mary's life as *Avvocata e Protettrice*, a life that many continue to view as one of active and ongoing assistance. Popular prints captured the experience of this sight, translating a culturally articulated space into a metonymic image that at once recalled to the minds of votive donors and print-purchasing pilgrims their own journey to this hallowed place and the everlasting and never-ending *vita* of the Madonna *Mediatrice* who sanctified it.

V

SIGNS OF FAITH, SIGNS OF SUPERSTITION

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1–3

The prayers of the Church ... work at once both as cause and as sign.

Martino Del Rio, *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex*, 1599–1600¹

I was astonished when I read that in his death-agony he dedicated his fur cloak to the Blessed Virgin [of Leuven] and ordered it to be conveyed immediately. God immortal, what old woman's superstition is this?

Isaac Casaubon, letter to Julius Scaliger, May 30, 1606,
concerning Justus Lipsius's final devotional offering²

Giovanna, wife of Simone di Pontevigo who was 23 years old and was possessed [inspiritata] for two years, devoutly visited the place of the apparition [of the Madonna del Fonte of Caravaggio], and bathed in the Fountain, and was fully liberated on April 15, 1433.

Paolo Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa
Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 1603³

Anathematizing the position taken by the Council of Hiereia in 754, the Council of Nicaea II set forth on October 13, 787, an official and universally binding resolution that supported the “tribute of salutation and respectful veneration” of sacred images.⁴ In ending what it labeled “the darkness of idolatrous insanity,” at least temporarily, the council took pains to refute the most serious of iconoclastic charges, maintaining that a material image could, in fact, bridge the gap that separates matter from spirit.⁵ Reasoning that sacred images move the mind of the viewer beyond the visible and substantive to the invisible and immaterial, Nicaea II pronounced that “the honor paid to

an image traverses it, reaching the model.” Regarding images of the sacred as effective vehicles through which the holy can permeate the material world, the council asserted further that by frequently looking upon representations of “our Lord, God and savior, Jesus Christ, and of our lady without blemish [Virgin Mary] ... and of the revered angels and of any of the saintly holy men,” the faithful increasingly will be “drawn to remember and long for those who serve as models.” Nearly eight centuries later, in 1563, the 106 bishops, two cardinals, four mitred abbots, and four generals of religious orders constituting the Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church at Trent echoed the words of the Nicene resolution.

The Council of Trent had assembled twice, first in 1545–47 and again in 1551–52, before it took up the interrelated issues of the “intercession of saints, the invocation of them, the reverence for their relics, and legitimate use of [sacred] images” at its final assembly, which opened with its seventeenth session on January 18, 1562, and concluded with its twenty-fifth on December 4, 1563. When it did, it was already late in the game. Although iconophobia was not unknown in Italy, the virulent iconoclastic disruptions experienced in Northern Europe were virtually unknown south of the Alps and west of the Pyrenees, the very areas represented by the majority of prelates in attendance at Trent. Reflecting the principal concerns of its members, the council focused on matters it viewed as most pressing: reform of the episcopacy and of the pastorate.⁶ It was only with the late arrival of the French delegation on November 13, 1562, that the use and misuse of images and relics was raised.⁷ With direct experience of the destructiveness of religious upheaval, Charles de Guise (Cardinal Charles of Lorraine) presented a memorandum to the council on January 3, 1563, that included an article (number 29) dealing specifically with images. Citing the “grave public disturbances” incited by iconoclasts, the memorandum requested measures be taken “that the faithful are properly instructed in church teaching regarding the veneration of images.” Furthermore, it urged the implementation of steps “to eliminate the abuses and superstitious practices that have grown up in that regard.”⁸

While the French-authored memorandum was sent to Rome with comments by the chief legate and several canonists, article 29 received scant remark. Finally, and hurriedly, the council turned to the matter raised in the document on the afternoon of its last working day, December 2. Two days later, on December 4, the council’s voting members approved formally, but without debate, the proposal affirming the position “against the iconoclasts” adopted by the church centuries earlier at Nicaea. Like the Nicene document it referenced, the Tridentine decree exhorted the faithful to bestow “due honor and reverence” toward “images of Christ, the Virgin Mother of God, and the other saints.” It also restated the earlier council’s reminder that such veneration “is referred to the original, which they represent,” and not the material object

mirroring their likeness. Lastly, it called for an end to any and all practices involving images that could be construed as superstitious.

The Tridentine directive resonated with more than the language of Nicaea II. It reiterated the French memorandum, warning people against believing that “some divinity or power” resides within the image. Nothing, Trent counseled, “is to be expected from them” nor should “confidence ... be placed in images as was done by the pagans of old.” In allowing for “great benefits [to] flow from all sacred images,” Trent reiterated Rome’s contention that a representation and its referent were not to be confused as being one and the same. To interact with the former as if it were the latter was to commit an abuse. Images are to serve as reminders “of the great gifts and blessings conferred on us by Christ” and taken as exemplars of righteousness. In tacit acknowledgment that popular devotional practices did not always reflect this orthodox view, the church ordered all superstition removed from the use of sacred images (*omnis superstitio in imaginum sacro usu tollatur*).

AMPLIFYING TRENT

As a consequence of its hasty approval, the Tridentine decree “De invocatione, veneratione et reliquiis sanctorum, et sacris imaginibus” lacked guidelines for its implementation. Although the council told the bishops to “root out abuses,” eradicate “representations of false doctrine” (*falsi dogmatis imagines*), eliminate images with “sensual appeal” and “seductive charm,” and quash the superstitious practices that signaled error by the unlettered, it failed to tell them how this was best to be achieved. Practical directives required clear consensus, yet even within the bounds of the Catholic world there was “nothing like unanimity” concerning where, exactly, devotion and pious practice ended and “vain observances” and superstitious performance began.⁹ This did not mean there was an absence of voices willing to propose where the dividing line should be drawn. In the months and years following Pope Pius IV’s confirmation of Trent’s canons and decrees on January 26, 1564, a “veritable explosion” of published treatises and tracts took up the challenge of, among other tasks, evaluating the suppositions and apocryphal elements that had accumulated around so-called miracle-working images, efficacious relics, and sundry sacramental objects believed to have curative powers equal to that of contact relics, such as holy water, candles consecrated on Easter Eve, and oil taken from lamps illuminating sacred sites.¹⁰ Concurrently, provincial councils in Cambrai (Concilium Cameracenes, 1565), Milan (Conciliorum Mediolanense I–IV, 1565–76), Mexico (Conciliorum Mexicanum, 1585), and Malines (Conciliorum Mechliniense, 1607) amplified Trent’s brief remarks on image appearance and use.¹¹ To varying degrees and reflecting regionally diverse popular, cultural, and political concerns, myriad texts and councils throughout the Catholic world weighed

claims of devotional efficacy and considered a variety of image related matters, including the scope of ecclesiastical oversight, the authority of scriptural texts vis-à-vis artistic invention, and issues of decorum in relation to site, subject, and spectator.¹²

While ecclesiastics placed greatest consideration on the proper imagery *ad instructionem eruditum* and missed no opportunity to condemn “pictures which offend the eyes, corrupt the mind, and kindle base pleasures” – to quote the Flemish theologian and rector of Louvain University, Johannes Molanus (1533–85) – a few also commented on a type of popular devotional object the council had failed to discuss but one it surely must have had in mind when it ordered the clergy to stamp out superstition and other misguided practices that had grown up around sacred images: namely, votive objects and pictures.¹³ Reformers argued that the sight of *immagini* cast in wax or metal, *tavolette votive* depicting miraculous cures and rescues, rings and bracelets, crutches and cloaks, shackles and ropes, and a miscellany of other items piled high before and beside a sacred image blurred any clear distinction between the representation they framed and the represented intercessor, whose mediation with God they were intended to venerate. Who or what, they queried – intercessor or image – was in receipt of these signifying things? Comments by Gasparo Contarini in his 1517 treatise on the ideal bishop indicate there was nothing new about the question and the all-too-easy slide between image and referent it implicitly acknowledged. Lamenting the popular profession of “so many fake miracles” and urging the bishop to “cut away all this sort of superstition,” Contarini took note of a common practice. In times of trouble, the *popolani* “immediately exasperate the saints [and] even the statues of the saints [*divorum simulacra*] with most of their prayers.”¹⁴

General references to ex-votos and, more pointedly, those specific to votive pictures are frustratingly few and maddeningly terse in texts written to clarify Tridentine doctrine following the council’s conclusion. Rather than augment Trent’s warning against “representations of false doctrine that give occasions of dangerous error to the unlettered,” amplify its prohibition against images that “offend the pious mind” with nudity, lasciviousness, and obscenities, or expand the discussion to include popular art forms that had been overlooked, provincial councils tended to repeat virtually verbatim Trent’s language.¹⁵ The provincial Council of Milan was no exception. Under the leadership of Charles Borromeo, the third Provincial Council of Milan took up the issue of sacred images on April 9, 1573.¹⁶ Referencing Trent, the assembly cautioned against pictures that ran counter to church dogma, deviated from biblical truth, or offended the faithful. At its fourth meeting in 1576, it turned to the related matter of miracles associated with relics and images.¹⁷ Paying particular attention to the susceptibility of the minds of the *pusillis et rudibus*, or uneducated, lower strata of society, as well as the din of their voices “clamoring” for miracles, the

provincial council stressed the importance of tradition and warned the faithful against hanging up votive offerings or anything new that went beyond the bounds of established custom (*votave, aut oblationis suspendi, aut quidquam novi*).

Borromeo's *Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae*, which was published the following year, did little to clarify this rather vague admonition, even though it otherwise presented the provincial council's deliberations in the form of protracted guidelines.¹⁸ Reflecting the archbishop's greater concern with the physical fabric and layout of churches, the section dealing with sacred art is comparatively brief. That dealing with votive images and objects, which is concerned with how painters depicted figures rather than the beliefs that informed the act of offering, is briefer still. At the conclusion of chapter 17, "On Sacred Images and Pictures" (*De sacris imaginibus picturisve*), only a single paragraph under the subheading *De tabulis votorum* touched on the topic.

Concerning votive tablets, offerings, images of melted wax, and other such things which are in memory of recovered health, of escapes from danger, [or] of Divine and miraculous benefits received and which, according to ancient practice, are usually suspended in churches, because they are frequently represented falsely, indecorously, shamefully, and superstitiously, the above prescribed caution should be exercised in depicting them.¹⁹

Bologna's Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti seems to have intended to say more on the subject of ex-votos than did his Milanese counterpart.²⁰ Ultimately, however, he said less. In the wake of Trent, Paleotti assumed the ambitious mission of distinguishing sacred images from the profane and elucidating the church's position on art and the cult of images in response to Protestant censure and reformist criticism. Two of the projected five books constituting this effort were published as *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* in 1582. The final three books remained unwritten. Nonetheless, Paleotti disclosed in a detailed listing of contents the topics he intended to discuss. Votives were the subject proposed for book 5, [chapter 5](#): *Dei voti che offeriscono nelle chiese e quello che intorno a ciò si dovia servare* (On votives offered in churches and the conduct observed concerning them). The archbishop, it appears, wanted to widen the lens. His objective was to scrutinize donation practices in addition to examining what votives should or should not look like.

In light of Trent's concern with the erroneous use of sacred images, the few references to and unrealized discussion of ex-votos seem rather surprising. Indeed, the near silence about these signifying things is deafening, but not simply – as Borromeo seems to imply – because a *tavoletta votiva* might depict a woman baring her cancerous breast or because a waxen *immagine* might have been cast in the form of a penis or uterus. While one would think that the display of reproductive anatomy within a church would have generated a fair amount of comment concerning issues of decorum, the paucity of references

to ex-votos – something that is notable in and by itself – suggests anxiety was aroused by another issue. In keeping with Tridentine decree, provincial councils were of a singular voice in expressing concern about a perceived slide by the uneducated majority from unambiguous orthodox faith to murky superstitious belief. This united them, whether in Milan, Malines, or Mexico, in lining up behind Trent in stipulating the removal of any taint of superstition from any and all practices involving the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and general use and honoring of sacred images. It is difficult to divorce the visual ensemble of a cultic image framed by votive pictures and objects from this unified conciliar call. In fact, the context in which ex-votives are mentioned indicates recognition of votives as pictures and objects signaling a misguided belief that “some divinity or power” *did* lie within a sacred image (as opposed to the referent working through it). Questioning causation by asking who or what – intercessor or image – was responsible for the purported miracles memorialized by votives was not an idle query.

In the few texts striving to explicate Trent’s position on cultic images and attendant practices that included (or, in the case of Paleotti’s *Discorso*, were projected to include) a pointed review of ex-votos, the topics addressed before and after the subject of votives is broached are telling. Invariably, the topic of ex-votos is raised between an author’s reflections on behaviors signifying correct faith and those indicating spurious or superstitious beliefs. While Paleotti connected causally *idolatria* with *falsa osservazione* under the chapter heading “Delle pitture superstitione” (*Discorso*, book 2, chapter 8), implying by his use of the term *falsa* rather than *errore* some degree of intent on the observer’s part, he skimmed past the issue. As stated earlier, he intended to speak directly to it in an unrealized portion of the treatise. As outlined in the table of contents, a discussion of ex-votos was to be sandwiched between chapter 4, which concerns the proper placement of sacred images and the fallacy of nonbelievers (*inganno degli eretici*) regarding those images, and chapter 6, which was to address the accretion of a miscellany of (questionable) things in churches, such as weapons and military insignia, deer antlers, ostrich eggs, pelicans, and crocodiles (presumably of the sort pictured in Paolo Maria Terzago’s engraving of Manfredo Settala’s *Kunst- und Wunderkammern* in Milan).²¹ In the published proceedings of the provincial Council of Milan IV, votives are mentioned in the context of church ornamentation, a brief discussion that is followed by one concerning the efficacy of indulgences (1:3), which, in turn, is succeeded by a section on superstition (1:4).²²

Perhaps the most revealing alignment of topics is found in the decrees issued thirty years later by the provincial Council of Malines. Here, the five chapters composing *De Imaginibus & Sanctorum Reliquiis* are followed by four grouped under the heading *De Superstitione*.²³ Significantly, the last of these focused on a miracle commonly enacted at thaumaturgic shrines: the liberation of the

possessed from the vexations of demons. Numerous entries and a handful of illustrations in shrine miracle books as well as an array of visualizations on dozens of *tavolette votive* offered by supplicants in the wake of a successful exorcism demonstrate that requests for intercession, performances of exorcism, perceptions of image efficacy and the miraculous, and ex-votos were intertwined in ways that many considered to be unorthodox and in need of clerical supervision. With this in mind, it is worth considering two entries in two miracle books. One, written at the beginning of the sixteenth century, chronicles an incident that occurred at a Marian shrine on the edge of the village of Tirano in the foothills of the Dolomites. The other records a late sixteenth-century practice involving the fresco fragment known as the Madonna dell'Arco enshrined in a sanctuary on the outskirts of Naples.

Less than nine months after the Virgin Mary appeared to Mariolo Homodei on September 29, 1504, Andriosen of Samnaun, a German (*todescho*) residing in Bassa Engadina, and his half-witted and demoniac (*mentecapta, indemoniata*) wife arrived in the tiny sub-Alpine town of Tirano in a region of Italy described disparagingly in 1518 as a “place more mountain than valley” that “for the most part” is populated by people who “are more ignorant than anything else ... completely lacking in the forms of civilized society ... [and whose] customs are most frequently rustic and wild.”²⁴ The couple had trekked south across the Alps to the “most holy and blessed place” of Tirano – as it was characterized in the shrine’s *libro dei miracoli* – in search of a miracle. The nature of the sought miracle would have been readily apparent to anyone witnessing the couple’s arrival for, in accordance with a practice visualized on several *tavolette votive* (Figure 15), the possessed woman was shackled in order to control the violence of her brutish outburst. Although the shrine marking the site of Mary’s apparitional visitation on the edge of the town was at this time little more than several courses of bricks, an altar had been erected.²⁵ According to the *Libro dei miracoli della Madonna di Tirano*, Andriosen first dismounted then cast his fettered wife before the altar. The distraught husband spent the next three hours reciting the popular prayer “O Intermerata” and attending Mass. At last, his wife was liberated from “her said infirmity.” Secure in the belief that a recurrence would not happen, the grateful couple departed Tirano leaving behind an ox as a votive offering *per grazia ricevuta*.

The date of Andriosen’s pilgrimage precludes the possibility of image involvement. While the apparition encountered by Mariolo Homodei was soon to be given material form by the sculptor Giovan Angelo del Maino (active 1496–1536), in the spring of 1504 neither his polychrome wood statue, executed between 1519 and 1524, nor the anonymously painted fresco recording Mariolo’s meeting of the Madonna on the edge of town, which is dated 1513, existed as a visual focal point for pilgrims. At this moment in time, remedial power was invested in a trace of presence (Mary’s footprint) and

realized through prayer. It was enough for Andriosen to stand on ground made holy by Mary's visionary presence and perform prescribed devotions. Written a century later, Fra Arcangelo Domenici's *Compendio dell'istoria, miracoli e gratie della Madonna Santissima dell'Arco* of 1607 posited a different remedial source for the ills of demonic possession. Predictably, it reflects the material focal point of devotional activities at this shrine. In contrast to Tirano, the Neapolitan site was not linked to an apparitional visitation and its testamentary trace. Here, a weathered fresco that had reportedly bruised when struck by a ball thrown in anger was the overt central hub of devotionism. A physically transformed image rather than a plaque placed on the ground thus signified the miraculous. The different signifiers of sacred presence – a marker inscribed “UBI STETERUNT PEDES MARIAE” at Tirano versus a painting of the Madonna marred by blasphemous abuse near Naples – moved supplicants to take very different actions in their quests for assistance from the same ill-state of being. According to Fra Arcangelo, devotees of the Madonna dell'Arco, not unlike those of other so-called miraculous images such as Lucca's Madonna dei Miracoli, collected dust from the sacred image with a *bambace*, or piece of cotton wadding. Next, they burned the dust-laden *bambace*, mixed the resultant ashes with holy water, and drank the concoction. The *effetti mirabilis* of this mixture included warding off “malignant spirits, witches, illness, and [evil] things” that caused sickness.²⁶ The benefits of sacred image dust went beyond the prophylactic. In the *Compendio*, Fra Arcangelo records that on two separate occasions dust gathered from the Madonna dell'Arco forced Satan into retreat. Considered collectively, textual descriptions and visualizations of exorcism, including those on votive panels, reflect the Tirano-Naples divide. An image, no less than a footprint attesting apparitional presence, was a potent source of efficacy, one capable of sending demons into retreat.

IMAGING EXORCISM

Although not notably large in number relative to votive panels representing impending disasters at sea or the sick confined to their beds, *tavolette votive* commemorating a successful exorcism (Figure 61) or, more commonly in the latter sixteenth century, those depicting a performance of the ritual (Plate 7, Figure 66) are found in most Italian collections. The Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco, for example, has seven. Because only a couple of panels can be paired with one of the six entries citing a miraculous victory over demonic spirits recorded in the shrine's miracle book, the number of on-site exorcisms can be presumed to have been higher than the number suggested by either visual evidence or textual record. Similarly, the Shrine of Nicholas of Tolentino preserves only two panels offered in gratitude for liberation from demonic possession even though the saint was known early on to be efficacious in instigating



61. Anonymous, successful exorcism of Zuane Milanese, *tavoletta votiva*, circa 1500–10. Tempera on panel. Cesena, Sanctuary of the Madonna del Monte. (Photo: author)

a release from torment. Not only is Nicholas's ability to cast out demons referenced in the life cycle painted in the shrine's Grand Chapel by Pietro da Rimini (Figure 36), but no less than thirteen individuals deposed during the friar's canonization proceedings in 1325 told investigating authorities that the holy man had miraculously rescued them from diabolical forces.²⁷ As for Viterbo's Sanctuary of the Madonna della Quercia, it no longer possesses any exorcism-related *tavolette* among its corpus of around seventy popularly given votive pictures. Nonetheless, Fra Raimondo Ciucci's *I miracoli d. SS. Maria della Quercia* of 1686, a manuscript that purports to reproduce many of the individually donated *tavolette* and communally offered *tavole* that used to cover the walls of the Viterban sanctuary, includes two such *miracoli*. Moreover, the fresco cycle in the adjacent monastery's Chiostro Grande highlights the efficacy of the Madonna della Quercia in such matters.²⁸ In the case of Caravaggio's Sanctuary of the Madonna del Fonte, where, according to Paolo Morigia's *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio* (1602 edition), no less than nine women and two men were liberated from the clutches of *maligni spiriti*, we lack even a secondary record like Fra Raimondo's manuscript.²⁹ Yet, as the case of Andriosen's possessed wife relates and images like those in Raimondo Ciucci's manuscript explicitly show, individuals afflicted by illness or erratic behaviors attributed to demonic intrusion or explained as

the result of *maleficium* (magic intended to harm or sicken) traveled expressly to thaumaturgic sites to be cured on site.³⁰ The results of Andriosen's actions at Tirano and the practice of collecting and ingesting dust from miracle-working images in Naples, Lucca, and elsewhere suggest that being in the presence of the divine, indeed coming into direct, tactile contact with it, was especially important when one confronted malevolent forces. In contrast to the majority of miracles, yet similar to that of infant resuscitation, the task of expelling malignant spirits from the possessed was apparently believed by many to be most successful when actually performed on ground hallowed by saintly presence, such as a holy man's tomb, a contact relic, a trace (footprint), or landscape feature (usually a natural spring) marking the place of one of the Madonna's apparitional visitations. Being within clear, visual proximity to a sacred, miracle-working image was equally effective. In other words, the physical presence of the votary in proximity to the spiritual *praesentia* of the intercessor was critical when it came to engaging the demonic in battle.

Long appreciated as a miracle, the casting out of demons was taken as a sign of sanctity, an unassailable mark of efficacy. Accordingly, exorcism was made a staple of hagiographic imagery. It was represented in life cycles frescoed on church walls, depicted among the episodic vignettes on *vita* altarpieces and historiated altarpiece predellas, and featured on covers of *vite* that were often published in octavo format and intended for popular consumption and wide distribution.³¹ By the second half of the sixteenth century, exorcism began to be featured on popular prints advocating a would-be saint's case, or *causa*, for canonization, as seen, for instance, in Mattheus Greuter's engraving *Filippo Neri della Misericordia* of 1606. It was similarly featured on promotional prints published by thaumaturgic shrines, as evidenced by its inclusion (on the sheet's lower left-hand corner) among the eight illustrated *miracoli* on a sixteenth-century engraving issued by the Sanctuary of the Madonna of Tirano (Figure 19). A survey of these images reveals representations of exorcism to have had three distinctive forms: a miracle performed by a saintly person during his or her lifetime; a postmortem miracle enacted beside a saint's tomb; and an on-site miracle achieved in the presence of a miracle-working image, one that typically represented the Madonna and often involved clerical assistance.

Viewed as an illustration of an individual's *imitatio Christi* and employed as evidence of a person's *fama sanctitatis* (fame or renown of sanctity), scenes of the first type often figured in the arsenals of advocates of candidates for canonization.³² Pietro da Rimini's fresco of Nicholas of Tolentino exorcising demons, which was painted at or around the same time authorities were hearing testimony concerning Nicholas's sanctity and well over a century before the Augustinian friar was canonized, should be viewed in this context. So, too, should the many printed *Vita et miracula* that began to circulate at the end of the sixteenth century, including Greuter's engraving touting the *fama sanctitatis*

of Filippo Neri published nine years before the founder of the Oratorians was beatified by Pope Paul V in 1615 and sixteen years before he was canonized by Gregory XV in 1622.³³ Examples of the second (postmortem) type are most commonly seen among the episodic vignettes on *vita* icons. The tombside exorcism on the *vita* altarpieces of St. Margaret of Antioch (Plate 2) and that of St. Francis in the Bardi Chapel of Sta. Croce (Figure 35) are representative of the two typical forms of depiction. In the first instance, a black, impish demon simply hovers above the head of a bearded pilgrim. Its visible presence does little more than signal Margaret's capacity to liberate the possessed just as she is able to assist the swooning pregnant woman, restore mobility to the crippled, and otherwise help those assembled around her sepulcher. By contrast, the scene pictured in the St. Francis vignette captures at least some of the drama detailed in St. Jerome's description of Paula shuddering at the sight confronting her at the burial place of the prophets in the Holy Land. "There she was met by the noise of demons roaring in various torments, and, before the tombs of the saints, she saw men howling like wolves, barking like dogs, roaring like lions, hissing like snakes, bellowing like bulls; some twisted their heads to touch the earth by arching their bodies backward; women hung up-side down in mid-air."³⁴ Jerome's account is admittedly more spectacular than most and was undoubtedly unfamiliar to the majority of common folk; nonetheless, later accounts of purgations, which took place increasingly within the communal gathering space of a church, have a striking similarity to it. For example, Francesco Maria Guazzo, a brother in the Milanese Order Ambrosini, described in *Compendium maleficarum* of 1608 how a man, who was "possessed by a demon [and] appeared more like a snarling, barking dog than a reasoning and speaking" human being, grew quiet and was "purged" after he was "with great difficulty forced into the church" and, once there, made to wear an *Agnus Dei*.³⁵ Together, holy place and sacred symbol united to conquer the minions of Satan.

A predella belonging to a now disassembled altarpiece by the Master of Saint Severin, circa 1470–80, in the Horne Museum in Florence, presents a variation of the postmortem miracle (Figure 62). The scene is set on a street in front of the double doorway of an ambiguously defined building. Dramatically, a woman collapses backward. Two young men grip her arms in an effort to keep her upright. A priest, holding a book in one hand and gesturing with the other, leans in earnestly toward the fainting victim and recites adjurations from what is clearly an exorcism manual. Standing erect and holding a candle with his left hand that he shields with his right, a second priest observes the suspenseful proceedings. His presence is an important one. For practical reasons, exorcism manuals advised those who performed the ritual to hold a burning taper near the possessed. When the demons exit the victim's body, it was said, the candle's flame would go out, thus signaling the ritual's success.



62. Master of St. Severin, *Exorcism of a Possessed Woman*, circa 1470–80. Florence, Horne Museum. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York)

The inclusion of a fleeing, impish spirit suggests this will soon occur, but not solely through clerical effort. Partially obscured by the small cloud from which he emerges and poised in the space above and between the two clergymen, the spirit of St. Severin (d. 550) is pictured playing a catalytic role. Like the priest adjuring Satan, St. Severin extends his right arm in a pointing gesture of command. In contrast to earlier exorcism scenes such as the one included on the Bardi Chapel Altarpiece (Figure 35), the panel depicts, according to Nancy Caciola, “a new model of exorcism, one in which the sacred power of the saints is mobilized through the clerical performance of a written liturgy.”³⁶

During the sixteenth century this model would take hold and become even more pronounced through a clearer identification of a site as sacred. While visualizations of exorcisms of these varied types continued, by midcentury exorcisms performed in visual proximity to a miracle-working image began to come to the fore, especially in the popular, reproductive medium of books. Sometimes, as in Pierre Boaistuau’s book of wonders, *Histoires prodigieuses et memorables*, specifically the second edition of 1575, clerics perform the rite

in front of an altar graced by a representation of the Madonna and Christ Child in the form of a relatively small statue (Figure 63).³⁷ In other instances, such as a copperplate engraving from *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli e grazie della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze* of 1619, a miracle book (and successor to Luca Ferrini's *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 1593) compiled by Giovanni Angelo Lottini, exorcism is depicted as a miracle affected solely through the image (Figure 64).³⁸ Members of the clergy are nowhere to be seen, and the Virgin is present only as represented in the acheiropoietic fresco of the Annunciation. As in other works that Gabriele Paleotti placed in the fifth of eight categories of *immagini sacre*, agency is pictured as coming through (*col mezzo*) a venerated work of art.³⁹ Kneeling before the painting that was purportedly completed by an angelic hand, four women implore Mary to restore well-being. As in the St. Severin predella, demons – here there are three – cannot withstand the power of the divine. They flee as a man watches in amazement.⁴⁰

Although these three ways of picturing an exorcism were distinctive (as a miracle performed by a saintly person during his or her lifetime, a postmortem miracle enacted beside a saint's tomb, and an on-site miracle achieved in the presence of a miracle-working image), there are examples of their conflation. *St. Catherine Exorcising a Possessed Woman*, a predella painted by Girolamo di Benvenuto (1470–1525) around 1505 (Figure 65), for instance, situates the scene on holy ground and in close proximity to a sacred image of the Madonna and Child flanked by saints, not unlike the illustrations in Lottini's *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli* and Boaistua's *Histoires prodigieuses*. However, in accordance with hagiographic tradition, St. Catherine assumes a crucial, catalytic role in the drama.⁴¹ With her hands raised



63. Pierre Boaistua, *Histoires prodigieuses extraictes de plusieurs fameux auteurs, grecs & latins, sacrez & prophanes*, second edition, 1575, sig. Aa recto. Cambridge, MA, Houghton Library *FC5.B6303.560. (Cambridge, MA, Houghton Library, Harvard University)



64. Giovanni Angelo Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli e grazie della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze*, 1619, page 248. Cambridge, MA, Houghton Library Typ 625. 19.532. (Cambridge, MA, Houghton Library, Harvard University)

in supplication and with crippled pilgrims gathered around her, Catherine mediates with Mary on behalf of the pious. In this image intercession is attained through an established hierarchy. As Catherine's devotees turn to her, so does she, in turn, look to the Madonna, who, as the most favored among God's saints and in accordance with Lorenzo Monaco's *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* (Plate 1), has greatest access to God. It is a privileged status that accounts for the Madonna's reputation as an exorcist.⁴²

Ranging from kneeling figures offering prayerful thanks after the fact to depictions of the rite in progress, *tavolette votive*, like book illustrations and predella scenes, are similarly varied in their presentation of an exorcismal event. A panel dated circa 1500 and dedicated jointly to the Madonna del Monte of Cesena, who is represented nestled within a cloud in the upper right-hand corner of the frame, and the Madonna of Loreto, who emerges from the

sanctuary enclosing her holy house on the left, is among the earliest surviving examples (Figure 61). Although the panel is preserved at Cesena, the pictured supplicants focus their full attention on the Madonna of Loreto. A protracted inscription set within the structural boundary of the Lauretan shrine identifies the votary and his companions.⁴³ It informs the viewer that one year after his miraculous liberation, Zuane Milanese, accompanied by his mother and brother, made a pilgrimage to the two sites, which are separated from one another by a distance of nearly 160 kilometers. In addition to his *tavoletta*, Zuane left a chalice at each shrine. The inscription, which identifies the *mira-colato* as hailing from Milan and notes the passage of a year since his liberation, suggests that this miracle did not take place on sacred ground and, therefore, not within sight of the intercessor's image.⁴⁴ In this regard, Zuane's panel is distinctive. While a few other *tavolette* similarly picture only a votary, a departing demon, and the exorcising intercessor in an ambiguous place, they lack an



65. Girolamo di Benvenuto, *St. Catherine Exorcising a Possessed Woman*, circa 1505. Denver, CO: Denver Art Museum: Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. 1961.171. (Photo: Denver Art Museum)

inscription that locates the exorcism at a distance from the intervening saint's shrine or image. Indeed, a sixteenth-century panel at Tolentino visually identifies Nicholas not only as a spiritual presence within a nebulous aureole but also as a physical attendant standing firmly on the same ground on which his devotee kneels. More typically, especially in the later sixteenth century, *tavolette* commemorating a successful exorcism include a surfeit of detail revealing, if not the full drama of the procedure, some aspect of it. Moreover, they do so in a manner that, like the St. Severin predella, attributes efficacy to the combined efforts of clergy and saints. Significantly, they do in ways that accord with prescriptive texts that were first published individually in the sixteenth century and then reprinted collectively under the title *Thesaurus exorcismorum* in 1608, the same year Fra Arcangelo Domenici recorded the miracles enacted by the Madonna dell'Arco – including the efficacy of image dust in warding off and expelling noxious spirits – and one year after the provincial Council of Malines contextually connected superstition, exorcism, and image use.

A hefty compendium that includes Girolamo Menghi's *Flagellum daemonum* (1577) and *Fustis daemonum* (1584), Valerio Polidoro's *Practica exorcistarum* (1585) and *Dispersio daemonum* (1587), Zacharia Visconti's *Complementum artis exorcisticae* (1589), and Antonio Stampa's *Fuga Satanae* (1597), *Thesaurus exorcismorum* has been called "a landmark of Christian demonology."⁴⁵ In addition to providing detailed lists of symptoms that would assist the exorcist in distinguishing a possessed individual (*obsessus*) from one who was bewitched (*maleficiatus* or *daemoniacus*), the *Thesaurus exorcismorum* presented officiants of the rite with more than twelve hundred pages of what amounts to a pragmatic collection of

scripts for performative, indeed liturgical, acts that were understood to be both *ex opere operata* and *ex opere operandis*. These included litanies of names with which to solicit the Madonna and invoke God as well as a listing of insults with which to adjure Satan. Also included were directions for expelling demons by first sketching and then burning the paper on which the picture was drawn and the accompanying name written. Instructions concerning the administering of certain herbs and holy water and the effectual use of signaling gestures, candles, incense, music, and the like were also provided.

As scholars have pointed out, the *Thesaurus* was very much a product of its time. "To be sure, there were lengthy formulas in earlier eras, mainly derived from baptismal exorcisms, but before the fifteenth century exorcisms tended to be more concise, and the techniques in large measure improvised."⁴⁶ During the fifteenth century, exorcism became a quasi-liturgical ritual that "achieved a striking visibility" in part through the production in large numbers of portable exorcism manuals and even single-sheet instructional guides offering unconventional litanies, lists, and formulas used principally by magicians and other amateur practitioners.⁴⁷ Among the more voluminous texts, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger's *Malleus malleficarum* of 1486, which acknowledged abuses in the practice and sought to replace "unlawful conjurations" with what the authors proposed as legitimate adjuration in their chapter "Prescribed Remedies: To Wit, the Lawful Exorcisms of the Church, for All Sorts of Infirmities and Ills Due to Witchcraft; and the Method of Exorcising Those Who Are Bewitched," reflects the same move away from improvised saintly tomb-side spectacle to studied liturgical performance visible in paintings and prints.⁴⁸

There is "little evidence" to explain how this change happened, but its occurrence cannot in any way be doubted. "Within a restricted time span and over a broad area," exorcism was "formalized into a scripted liturgy designed to serve the ideological needs of a Church beset by a crisis of authority from above ... and continual critiques from below."⁴⁹ However, attempts by the church to bring active and remedial mediation with supernatural forces under the control of certified orthodoxy, to wrest it from conjuring cobblers, cunning old women, and other lay practitioners and place it in the hands of priests canonically ordained in the apostolic succession, met numerous challenges.⁵⁰ Moreover, and as inquisitorial records document, lay healers were by no means the only ones whose exorcismal practices were questioned for signs of abuse and error. Members of the lower clergy recruited from among the laboring class because they "often shared both milieu and *mentalité* with their parishioners" dispensed curative charms and performed remedial rituals, including exorcism, that authorities perceived to be rooted in popular superstition.⁵¹ Concerns also swirled around some prescriptive texts that were in circulation before the initial publication of any of the manuals subsequently collected and reissued in

the *Thesaurus exorcismorum*. Published in at least sixteen editions between circa 1554 and 1597, the *Sacerdotale Romanum* was one such text of particular note. “For decades, some particularly vigilant bishops had recognized that this tome was contributing to the abuse of the rite and provoking a veritable epidemic of possessions,” especially in conventual communities. The situation prompted intervention by those at the highest level of the church hierarchy.⁵² As was true of other practices seen to be especially susceptible to abuse, exorcism came under heightened scrutiny after the adjournment of the Council of Trent. The prosecution by regional offices of the Roman Inquisition of superstitious offenses, such as magical healing, as well as inquisitorial reviews of image-related efficacy (the 1584 case involving the marble statue of the Madonna above the entrance to the Convent of San Bernardo discussed in [Chapter II](#) is a case in point) increased. The ongoing shift that saw exorcism move from unscripted performance to scripted rite, from a practice wrongfully carried out by uneducated village healers to one exercised by approved clergy, went hand in hand with the crackdown.

Paralleling all of this were publications by the Bolognese friar and exorcist Girolamo Menghi (1529–1609), including *Compendio dell’arte essorcista* (*Compendium on the Art of Exorcism*), *Flagellum Daemonum* (*The Devil’s Scourge*), *Fustis Daemonum* (*Club against Demons*), and *Fuga Daemon* (*The Demon’s Flight*).⁵³ While Menghi’s instructional treatises, all of which were reprinted numerous times, and the other texts composing the *Thesaurus* had the approval of the church, they were to be superseded in the early seventeenth century. In 1614 the *Rituale Romanum* essentially distilled the *Thesaurus* into a short but guiding text aimed at serving the papacy’s efforts to curb abuses.⁵⁴ Prepared by order of Pope Paul V, the *Rituale Romanum* compelled practitioners to meet requirements and follow procedures that were already in wide practice. Although only authorized priests were to perform the rite, which was to take place in a church or other sacred place, unauthorized officiants referenced the text as well.⁵⁵ In fact, inquisitorial records indicate that its use, or at least a dependency on one of Menghi’s manuals, was cited in defense against accusations of error. On more than one occasion, defendants countered charges of wrongdoing by professing an adherence to remedies prescribed by Menghi. The depiction of exorcisms on *tavolette votive* must be viewed against Rome’s efforts to end popular, independent access to the supernatural, especially in the years after Trent and during those leading up to the publication of the *Rituale Romanum*. Given the consequences of failing to respect Rome’s asserted claim on the ritual, it is, perhaps, not surprising that later sixteenth-century votive panels offered in acknowledgement of the cure routinely include members of the clergy and often reflect aspects of the procedure as it was prescribed in sanctioned manuals. The fact that the clerics are shown referencing a book in these pictures is, therefore, a significant detail.

A votive panel notable for its size – it is approximately two times larger than any other *tavoletta* in the collection at Tolentino – provides a particularly rich example of an exorcism rite (Plate 7). Offered by the parents of Chiara da Camerino, it acknowledges the critical role St. Nicholas played in their daughter's liberation from demonic possession on October 8, 1589. Nicholas was not, however, alone in precipitating the miracle. Not only is he represented in the heavenly company of St. Augustine and the Madonna, but, as is the case with the St. Severin predella (Figure 62), members of clergy assist the saints in restoring the woman to a state of well-being. The site of the ritual also helps, for as in Girolamo di Benvenuto's painting *St. Catherine Exorcising a Possessed Woman* (Figure 65), the ordeal is staged on sacred ground. On the panel's right, Chiara's exorcism is pictured in progress. No less than four members of the clergy assist the principal exorcist, who is singled out by his black garments and the white *stola* (believed to be an aid in snaring demons) draped around his neck.⁵⁶ Two of the four restrain the suffering Chiara. Another attendant lends physical support to the exorcist lest the demons strike back. The fourth, who also wears a *stola*, holds open the all-important book of prescribed formulas. Unlike the St. Severin picture but like the painting by Girolamo di Benvenuto, the setting is unequivocally identified as sacred. The *tavoletta*'s painter devoted roughly two-thirds of the pictorial field to a church interior, clearly identified as such by the altar and arched window. In the panel's center, St. Nicholas of Tolentino, set against an aureole of light that defines his presence as spiritual rather than physical, hovers above the altar before which three members of Chiara's family pray, their heads turned upward in supplication rather than bowed down in meditation. Nicholas appears a second time. Partially obscured by a heavenly cloud, he joins St. Augustine and the Madonna and Child in witnessing an impressively long line of demons exiting Chiara's body through her open mouth. Arcing over the altar, they escape into the monstrous mouth of fiery hell pictured on the panel's left.

An uninscribed panel in Loreto that probably dates within a decade of Chiara's is similarly specific with respect to site (Figure 66). Here, an exorcist dressed in clerical robes, wearing a *stola*, and holding an open book receives assistance from a man. In all likelihood, he is a member of the victim's family. With her arms flung wide, the possessed woman falls backward only to be shoved upright by the man. Like the officiating priest, she is draped with a devil-trapping *stola*. As is the case with Chiara, black demons are pictured spewing forth from the mouth of the possessed. Here, they flee toward the lead-paned window, seeking safety in the nonsacred space beyond the church's walls. A second finely dressed man, his hands clasped in prayer, watches from a secure distance behind the exorcist. He has no reason to be fearful. Nearly half of the depicted church interior is filled with a full-length representation of the Madonna of Loreto set within billowing clouds that swirl above and



66. Anonymous, exorcism, *tavoleta votiva*, late sixteenth century. Tempera on panel. Loreto, Museo Antico Tesoro della Santa Casa. (Photo: author with kind permission of the Archivio Storico della Santa Casa)

buoy Mary's Holy House, which was then recognized as the most efficacious of Marian sites.

EXORCISM: A CONTESTED RITUAL

The miraculous exorcising of demons recorded as having occurred at Tirano, Caravaggio, and elsewhere and, more pointedly, those that purportedly took place before miracle-working images of the Madonna as illustrated in Lottini's *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli e grazie della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze*, Fra Raimondo Ciucci's *I miracoli d. SS. Maria della Quercia*, and on Chiara da Camerino *tavoleta votiva* bring together two practices mired in the interrelated debate over superstition, image efficacy, and the elemental reality of life: intercession and votive donation; and exorcism and illness resulting from a natural cause versus one with a supernatural origin. Erasmus, to cite one especially prominent voice of the first half of the sixteenth century, had taken critical aim at both. In *Praise of Folly* (1511) and several colloquies, including "The Shipwreck" (1523) and "A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake" (1526), he mocked votive ritual.

In “Exorcism, or The Specter” (1524), he ridiculed exorcism. But the deriding humor Erasmus used to lay bare the gullibility of the ignorant in “The Shipwreck” and “A Pilgrimage” and employed to expose the self-aggrandizing stupidity of the clergy in “Exorcism, or The Specter” was not in evidence elsewhere. Increasingly, ridicule was replaced by wholesale condemnation of the Catholic Church and its “popish conjurations,” which were labeled “ridiculous and absurd.”⁵⁷ Although Martin Luther in the *Taufbüchlein* of 1523 as well as in the significantly revised edition of 1526 retained the rite as a way to cleanse the body and give “room to the Holy Spirit,” Martin Bucer (1491–1551), Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), John Calvin (1509–64), and others denounced it as a “papal relic.”⁵⁸

Catholic writers responded by casting Protestant scorn as derision born of failure. Protestants, they said, were simply unable to expel demons. Exorcism, they claimed, was the special preserve of the Roman Church. Adding his voice to that of the Jesuit Martino Del Rio (1551–1608), who held “the prayers of the Church ... work both as cause and sign at once,” Friedrich Förner (1570–1630) was later to argue that the “power of compelling demons, [of] driving them out ... is not found either among Lutherans or Calvinists ... rather it is only the Catholic priests, remaining in the unity of the Catholic Church [who can do this].”⁵⁹ Like other miracles attested by ex-votos donated by the faithful, yet denied by Protestants, who “insisted that miracles per se had ceased after the early Church,” a successful exorcism was seen as a sign of the true Religion.⁶⁰ After all, Scripture not only spoke of Jesus’ casting out of devils but also recognized the efficacy of his disciples to do likewise. Investing clergy with a similar capacity can be seen as furthering the Catholic Church’s “belief in its own continuous witness to apostolic truth.”⁶¹ So signified, exorcism was, unsurprisingly, scrutinized for superstitious error. Whether the typical staging of the ritual within view of a sacred image caused exorcism and the (im)proper use of images to be discussed in tandem under the rubric *superstitione* cannot be stated with assurance. However, as decrees issued by the Council of Malines demonstrate, a connection between the two was implicit.

In the decrees issued by the Council of Trent, the reference to superstition comes as a caution within the section “On the Veneration of Saints and the Honoring of Images.” Seeking to clarify Tridentine policy, the Council of Malines made superstition the topic of its own brief, discreet section. Significantly, it follows the similarly brief section dealing with images and relics, *De imaginibus & sanctorum reliquiis*, which, in keeping with the earlier Council of Milan, reiterated Trent’s stance concerning the proper appearance and use of sacred images. As one reads the section *De Superstitione*, it is difficult not to reflect upon the immediately preceding directives about image use and the veneration of relics in *De imaginibus & sanctorum reliquiis*. Indeed, with both sections acknowledging that the illiterate and uneducated (*rudis populus*)

are “contaminated with superstition,” the two brief, back-to-back discussions create a textual conversation reflecting, in the first instance, worry about “dangerous errors” committed with and around sacred images and, in the second, anxiety about a ritual susceptible to appropriation by “sorcerers.”

Echoing the language of Trent and resonating with the foundational definition of superstition set forth by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa theologiae*, the section in the Malines document titled *De Imaginibus & Sanctorum Reliquiis* begins with an unambiguous order. Catholics are to desist from using images in any way other than that approved by the church, and members of the clergy are to judiciously monitor all that goes on with and around images to ensure compliance. In the succeeding section, *De Superstitione*, images, having just been discussed, are not explicitly referenced. They nonetheless figure implicitly. The Tridentine statement allowing honor to be bestowed on a sacred image, while cautioning that it is not “because anything is to be expected from them,” reverberates in the Malines directive advising the unlettered that they are not to expect some sort of effect from objects and incantations (*expectare quemcumque effectum a quacumque re*). Surely, images were among the “things” the council had in mind. This injunction is coupled with the significant addendum: “unless approved by decree.” A similar addendum accompanies the edict concerning exorcism. No one is to perform the ritual without written permission (*licentia Ordinarii in scriptis obtenta*), and then it is to be performed only as officially prescribed.⁶² In view of the fact that exorcisms were most often staged within a church and in view of sacred images through which divine presence was perceived to be manifest, the textual placement of these passages, each distinguishing the illicit from the sanctioned, cannot have been by happenstance. It is simply too pointed.

The repeated insistence on “the ordination and approval of the Church” in *De Superstitione* was to prove enduring. Beginning with the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* of 1612 and continuing through Gaetano Moroni Romano’s *Dizionario di Erudizione Storico-Ecclesiastica* of 1855, superstition was defined as the “curious and vain observation of omens, sorcery, or similar things prohibited by true Religion.” Like the *Vocabolario*, the later *Dizionario* deemed misguided the belief in such things to be “false and vain religion.”⁶³ Of greater import is the *Vocabolario*’s reuse of a critical qualifier found in the decree from Malines and in other reform texts. Anything prohibited by the church fell into the category of the superstitious. Thus qualified, *superstitione* was understood as a “perversion of religion” and, therefore, subject to prosecution.⁶⁴ Among the cases that can be cited to illustrate the point was one that brought a saddler identified as Danese, son of Giovanni Francesco of Visso, before Rome’s papal magistrates on January 23, 1559. Although Girolamo Menghi began to pen and publish his various influential manuals as early as 1555, at this point in time his church-sanctioned instructions were not yet in wide circulation.

Unable to cite the use of Menghi's *Compendio dell'arte essorcistica* in his defense, Danese attempted to counter the charges of sorcery leveled against him by other means. Harboring the hope that a votive panel offered to the Madonna del Popolo and his possession of a rosary might act as material signs of proper piety, he reported that when authorities showed up to arrest him, he "begged [them] to let me keep the rosary that I had in my purse and a prayer that I had composed to the Madonna, which I wanted to place, with a picture [*tavoletta*], at the Popolo."⁶⁵ The ploy failed. Danese was returned to prison where he was subjected to three more weeks of incarceration and examination.

In order to understand how *tavolette votive* tendered to an intercessor in grateful gratitude for liberation from demonic vexations operated as signs, or *signe* as the Dominican theologian Sylvester Mazzolini da Prierio (1456/7–1523) referred to them in *De strigimagarum daemonumque mirandis* of 1521, they must be considered not only as autonomous pictures recording a remedial procedure but also – and importantly – as images that in their original contexts were displayed in a way that placed them in meaningful visual dialogue with another image, specifically that of the thaumaturge.⁶⁶ With respect to the former, that is as visual records of an actual event, they could, as Chiara da Camerino's panel illustrates, function as signs of an adherence to orthodox practices. Staged on holy ground and performed by clergy guided by formulas prescribed in manuals, they defined the exorcizing of demons as the sole preserve of the Catholic Church. At the same time, they announced in a very public way the votary's recognition of Rome's claim of exclusivity of a remedial rite described by Menghi as "highly potent and efficacious" (*potentissimi et efficaces*). However, when considered as they were originally exhibited, that is, in conjunction with a representation of a saint associated with miracles, they could be seen to acknowledge image complicity in the rite's success.

Demonologists like Prierio held the function of images to be one that facilitates invocation. Still, entreaties made before an image could not help but raise the specter of superstitious error, that such supplications attested the misguided belief that the image stood as a surrogate for the referent. How else can the performance of exorcisms in the presence of sacred images and the use of holy objects be explained?⁶⁷ Were the afflicted as well as those who attempted to cure them acting against Trent's decree, which ordered people to desist from "expecting" something of the image and to stop placing "confidence" in them "as was done by the pagans of old"?

These questions are made all the more thorny by one of the sanctioned prescriptions for exorcizing demons set forth in works by three noted demonologists: Girolamo Menghi's *Flagellum daemonum*, a text dedicated to Bologna's archbishop, Gabriele Paleotti, and one that was repeatedly republished – in 1578, 1580, 1584, 1597, 1599, and thereafter, in Valerio Polidori's *Practica exorcistarum* of 1585, and in Zacharia Visconti's *Peremptorium* of 1600. All three authors – an

Observant Franciscan, a Conventual Franciscan, and a brother of the Order of Saints Barnabus and Ambrose – detail a procedure calling for the exorcist to draw or paint the devil's portrait (the various terms used for the cryptic rendering are *imagine*, *imago*, and *effigia*), inscribe his name on the sheet, then burn the paper on which the demon was represented in image and by word. The formula, known as “Exorcism by Fire,” is discussed later in this chapter. Here, it is enough to pose an obvious question. If efficacy is denied to be inherent within a representation of a holy person, then why does it seemingly exist within an image of the possessing devil? While I have yet to see a *tavoletta votiva* depicting an exorcism conducted according to this specific formula, descriptions of “Exorcism by Fire” as well as related practices of burning images of the devil drawn on miters worn by condemned heretics call for a consideration of image use and signification.

SIGNS

In “The Superstitious Nature of Human Institutions,” a chapter in *On Christian Doctrine*, St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) articulated a conception of superstition that was to inform subsequent thinking and remain influential for the next millennium.⁶⁸ Significantly, he “construed *superstitio* within his larger theory of signs.” For Augustine, signs, which could be natural or conventional, such as smoke in the first instance and writing in the second, were things or actions that have “significance [that] exceeds their sensory appearance and are used to communicate.”⁶⁹ Other itemized things and actions were called into question.

All the arrangements made by men for the making and worshipping of idols are superstitious, pertaining as they do either to the worship of what is created or of some part of it as God, or to consultations and arrangements about signs and leagues with devils, such, for example, as are employed in the magical arts.... In this class we must place also all amulets and cures which the medical art condemns, whether these consist of incantations, or in marks which they call *characters*, or in hanging or tying on certain articles or even dancing in a fashion, not with reference to the condition of the body, but to certain signs hidden or manifest.... To these we may add thousands of the most frivolous practices ... [and] rules: To tread upon the threshold when you go out in front of the house; to go back to bed if anyone should sneeze when you are putting on your slippers; to return home if you stumble ... [and the like].⁷⁰

While Augustine viewed these “frivolous practices” as erring on the side of false belief and, therefore, as potentially harmful acts, it was with the development of canon law and the simultaneous emergence of ecclesiastical courts during the Middle Ages that such perceived follies were regarded increasingly

as religious deviance. According to Thomas Aquinas, superstition, which he calls “religion’s opposite,” is “a vice opposed to the virtue of religion by excess ... either because it offers divine worship to something not deserving of it; or because it offers worship in some manner which is unfitting.”⁷¹ As Nicaea II had done, and as Trent was to restate, Aquinas argued against the misplaced faith that leads to the idolatrous error of seeing the divine *in* and *as* the representational object itself as opposed to a simulacrum that enables one to look beyond the material rendering in order to contemplate God. But for Aquinas, as for ecclesiastics who discussed the issue both before and after him, drawing a hard and fast line between licit and illicit signs, which enabled one to distinguish orthodox practice from superstitious performance, was difficult. At least in part this was due to the fact that “the Church itself dealt primarily in signs.” Catholics as well as Protestants believed these signs were vulnerable to appropriation by either misguided individuals or malevolent forces.⁷² Guazzo explained the difficulty in *Compendium maleficarum*.

Most cunningly does Satan ... mask his magic under the appearance of religion: and this he does, both that he may more easily lead into superstitious error those who are naturally disposed to that cult; and that, by himself working miraculous cures, he may avert suspicion from his followers, so that it shall not be thought that he who has removed the sickness was the original cause of it.⁷³

Guazzo was not saying anything new. Drawing on Pierre Crabbe’s *Concilia omnia* of 1538 and in response to the papal call to the abortive Council of Mantua, Martin Luther challenged the constructive role of church councils in *On the Councils and the Churches* (1539). In this extended pamphlet, Luther characterized certain rituals as rites of the devil, “God’s ape,” arguing that the church encouraged the use of certain sacramentals and images in a manner “aping” the spurious actions of “rainmakers, sorcerers [and] exorcists of devils.”⁷⁴

Even before calls of reform echoed across Europe challenging the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, the fineness of the line separating true religion and putatively wrong religion was acknowledged. In *De Directione Cordis* (1417), the prominent theologian and chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Charlier de Gerson observed, “Some rites concerning God and the saints are lawful and obligatory; some are entirely unlawful, expressly forbidden by the Church; [and] some are in between, neither good nor bad in themselves ... [they are instead] morally good or bad according to the circumstances, especially the intention and purpose behind them.”⁷⁵ The challenge of determining which was which was made all the more difficult by the “independent creativity of popular tradition.” Extrapolating from liturgical observances and standard prayers and blessings, some lower clergy as well as lay

practitioners devised remedial recipes and procedures that retained the framework of orthodox practice but replaced sanctioned content with ritualized techniques “judged inappropriate and, hence, superstitious by theologians.”⁷⁶ As signifying objects of spiritual restoration as well as physical cure, ex-votos – and the sacred images they framed – teetered precariously on the dividing line between the virtues of “lawful and obligatory” practices and the vices of “religion’s opposite.” A figurine found stashed near the altar of the Cathedral Church of Feltre in May 1588 illustrates the point, underscoring Gerson’s concern with intent and purpose.

Described in a document of denunciation filed with the Venetian Holy Office as made of “white wax [and] about one foot high in the form of a naked man,” the recovered figurine was found ultimately to have been made by a local *ceraiuolo*, or fabricator of wax devotional objects, who specialized in crafting funerary ornaments and ex-votos.⁷⁷ In testimony offered to the Holy Office, the figure’s maker, one Pietro Grevo, reported the circumstances that led to the votive figurine’s highly unorthodox appearance: “a virile member and testicles” had been added to a standardized votive form, which, of course, otherwise lacked these anatomical features. These physical details provided in turn an explanation for the condition of the object upon its discovery. It was “stuck all over” with needles. The anatomical additions to the wax figurine, it turns out, had been made at the request of the purchaser, Elena Cumano. In the spring of 1588, the eighteen-year-old found herself in desperate straights. She was pregnant and jilted. Confronting personal disgrace and familial dishonor, Elena at first had taken the right road to rectify a dire situation, seeking her lover’s return by attending Mass, reciting the rosary, lighting candles, and giving alms. These were the actions of a good Christian, clear signs of her faith in God and confidence in his church. But these efforts had failed, prompting Elena to head down a path that gave her access to magical remedies. With this change of course, what was in its unaltered state an unremarkable sign of piety, a simple cast-wax object intended as an offering of thanks, was transformed into a sign of error, a tool of *maleficia ad amorem* (love magic). Elena Cumano’s case came to mind during a visit to the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco, for there among the votive objects displayed in one of the many vitrines exhibiting the site’s impressively large collection of ex-votos was a waxen *immagine* matching the description of the one Pietro Grevo fabricated for Elena. Probably made sometime during the past fifty years, it too had been altered by the addition of “a virile member and testicles.” Moreover, like its sixteenth-century forerunner, it was “stuck all over” with pins.

Much has been said concerning the often-blurred distinction between religious rituals and magic in the pre-Reformation church. There is additionally a great deal of insightful scholarship focused on post-Tridentine attempts to elucidate differences between the two. It is not my intent to restate a complex

of issues that others have reviewed with discerning depth.⁷⁸ Here, it is enough to first recall Gerson's view that "rites concerning God and the saints are ... neither good nor bad in themselves," rather their virtue or vice is the result of the user's intent and, second, to repeat an assessment of superstition by the theologian Heinrich von Gorkum (ca. 1378–1431) in his *Tactatus de supersticios quibusdam casibus* (Esslingen, 1473). After citing an array of popular safeguarding rituals and curative practices that range from inserting bits of consecrated wax inscribed with words from the liturgy into a building's structure to ensure its safety, to the wearing of amulets or crosses fashioned from bones of meat blessed during Holy Week, Von Gorkum argued that there is a proper and an improper way to look upon these things. They can be seen either as a form of devout prayer or as objects made and used with the goal of controlling destiny. In the first instance, they act as signs of faith. In the second, they cross into the realm of the unacceptable and, thereby, signify error.⁷⁹

Viewed as pictures depicting an actual incident, *tavolette* like the one left at San Nicola da Tolentino by the family of Chiara da Camerino record a sacramental rite performed quite literally by the book. In other words, it was performed in the right way, in the right place, and with the right frame of mind (*ex opere operandis*). The setting is sacred, and members of the clergy are present. They are also clearly in control. Yet like other votive objects, *tavolette votive* were viewed in conjunction with something else: a sacred image or holy relic. They cannot be seen meaningfully apart from the miraculous image or object they frame. This fact returns us to the Tridentine decree directing the faithful not to behave as if "some divinity or power" resides *within* the image, for like the prophylactic and curative use of image dust gathered from the Madonna dell'Arco, *tavolette* assert that exorcism works *ex opere operata* as well as *ex opere operandis*. Inevitably, this raises questions concerning agency. Does the advised practice of performing an exorcism within a sacred precinct and in visual proximity to a representation of Christ, the Madonna, or another saint implicitly recognize image efficacy? Exceptions to the rule (the social elite as well as those too ill to travel could be exorcised at home) suggest efficacy was not tied inextricably to images. Illustrations like those in Lottini's *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli e grazie della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze* (Figure 64) and Boaistuau's *Histoires prodigieuses* (Figure 63) convey the opposite. In these and other depictions of exorcism, an agentic link between image and *praesentia*, a connection between physically perceptible and spiritually invisible affecting presence is implied. Michel de Montaigne's account of the procession of the sudarium, which he describes as "un visage ouvrageus et color somber et obscure," within St. Peter's during Holy Week similarly suggests efficacy was seen by at least some to be within an image. "A woman, whom they declared to be *spiritata*, made a great uproar at the sight of this *figure* [of Christ], and began to screech, and twist her arms, and throw them about."⁸⁰ Montaigne's description of the woman's response to

the holy image resonates with the prescription for “Exorcism by Fire,” which holds that harm done to the image is experienced (*appropriare*) by the represented demon, seems a tactic acknowledgment that an image is not merely a rendering of something or someone but, rather, a proxy for the represented.

BURNING THE DEVIL’S IMAGE

Exorcism is typically characterized as a verbal encounter between “two human actants (the priest and the possessed), [who] exist only as generic, unspecified presences,” a “dialogic performance” that incorporates “all three branches of classical rhetoric: judicial (as in a trial, accusing the demon of his actions); deliberative (exhorting the demon to depart); and ceremonial or epideictic (praising the power of God and blaming Satan for taking possession of a human soul).”⁸¹ This cannot be questioned. Exorcism manuals are filled with litanies of names for God (Jehova, Alpha et Omega, Adonai, Tetragram, Theos, and others) and for Satan (father of lies, heretic, root of all evil, eternal curse, instigator of vices, fool, and so forth).⁸² The former enabled exorcists to invoke the ineffable and inexpressible power of divine being in a way that was comprehensible to the devil as well as to human beings. The latter allowed the exorcist to literally call forth demons that tended to seek refuge deep within the body of the possessed in order that the combat between the forces of good and evil could begin. Threatening the devil with impending doom, insulting him with a barrage of epithets, or trapping him in a web of self-contradictions spewed from the mouth of his unwilling and beleaguered host were not, however, the only routes to successful purgation. According to Menghi, the exorcist has recourse to other effective tools: images and fire. With a labeled sketch of the devil in hand, Menghi directed the exorcist first to summon the power of “God the almighty Father, who appeared to Moses in the form of fire ... by he who created every fire and from whom will come a devouring flame that will ... strike and destroy all those who are against him and do not obey his words.” He then advised the exorcist to “burn this sheet of paper on which the devil’s image is painted, the image of the demon now corresponding to [or appropriated by] this figure” and its written name. There can be little doubt that Menghi understood the devil’s *figura picta cum nomine eius* to be a surrogate for the hiding demon, for he added,

May the pain of fire now begin to strike cruelly [the devil] in all its being, and may it feel the fire’s force when I throw this painted image into the fire, so that it will burn, and thus its pain grow and increase ... a thousand-fold. After I have placed this diabolical image in the fire so that it will burn there ... may this evil spirit not be able to stand its pain.⁸³

Zacharia Visconti concurred. In addition to Menghi's directive, he recommended the image be cursed at, spat on, and stomped upon prior to being burned. When Visconti's directive is compared with a second exorcism that Montaigne witnessed while in Rome, the emergent picture of the rite suggests that an "Exorcism by Fire" quite literally saved the victim from additional agonies by deflecting blows to an image that otherwise would have fallen on the already tormented victim. On February 16, 1581, Montaigne was among the spectators watching a possessed man, who knelt "before the altar, his neck bound by some sort of cloth" (probably a *stola*), be liberated from demons. Addressing his remarks first to the *spiritato* and "sometimes to the devil in his [the demoniac's] body," the exorcising priest "recited prayers and exorcisms out of a manual." But in a battle for a human soul epithets were not always sufficient. The exorcist felt it necessary in this case to "deal heavy blows to the poor wretch with his fist, and spit in his face."⁸⁴ In lieu of inflicting slaps and punches on the already tormented victim, an exorcist could turn to the destructive power of fire.

Because Menghi's "Exorcism by Fire" is preceded by a procedure using water and is otherwise embedded in a plethora of remedies that rely upon the power of words, it is easily overlooked, especially by one consulting the twelve-hundred-page *Thesaurus exorcismorum*. To ignore it or dismiss out of hand its implications, however, would be a mistake given another and apparently more common practice that also involved the making and burning of the devil's image. The destruction of images of the devil was, it seems, a not altogether uncommon event, although the end to which this was done varied. Sometimes, burning the devil's image was a symbolic act. At other times, it was seen to have very real and practical consequences. Tossing an effigy of Satan on top of bonfires of vanities falls into the first category. Consigning heretics wearing miters painted with pictures of the devil to the flames falls into the second.

A defining symbol of a condemned heretic is a conical hat, or miter. Often, it was embellished with images of the devil. An illustration in Ulrich of Richental's fifteenth-century chronicle, for example, depicts Jan Hus (ca. 1369–1415) bound to the stake amid rising flames and wearing just such a miter. This and other depictions of Hus's execution visualize what witnesses of the event described. The miter that went up in flames with Hus was painted with the images of three devils seizing a soul, presumably that of the condemned religious reformer.⁸⁵ More than 150 years later, on July 8, 1586, the "public whore, witch, and herbalist" Emilia Catena "with miter" was paraded to Venice's *piazza* of San Marco and locked into the stocks. Unlike Hus's devil-emblazoned miter, the one worn by Emilia was "inscribed with large letters *per striga et herbera*." With Emilia thus shamefully crowned, there could be no doubt in the minds of spectators that she was, as charged, a witch, a "heretic and apostate."⁸⁶

This is not to say that miters were used to signify only heresy. In his biography of Ludovico Ariosto, Michele Catalano describes how, in 1496, the wife of Ferrara's police captain was forced to run through the city streets either fully or nearly naked (a spectacle known as *la scopa*) "wearing on her head a miter on which were painted some devils." Her committed crime was illicit sex, a transgression worthy of public humiliation and castigation, but not one warranting death by fire.⁸⁷ Although misbehavior of this sort was frequently intertwined with impiety of the heretical kind, it was the former more than the latter that caused the devil's effigy to be burned on the devil's feast of Carnival. Placed atop a great pile of objects regarded as signs of self-indulgence and self-conceit – these included cosmetics, books, and even paintings of mythological themes – Satan's image went up in flames as bonfires of vanities blazed in a ritual that has been characterized as an example of "official iconoclasm."⁸⁸

This said, the drawing, labeling, and burning of the devil's *imago* as prescribed by Menghi and others move the sanctioned destruction of images to a wholly different place, a place that situates Trent's decree against placing faith in images in opposition to practices endorsed by the Catholic Church. The punishment of *la scopa* coupled with the wearing of a miter imposed on the wayward wife of Ferrara's police captain and the practice of topping bonfires of vanities with the devil's effigy cast the image in the role of symbol. In both instances, the representation acts as a commentary on social mores and serves as a visual warning against impropriety. By contrast, and as Menghi stated, "Exorcism by Fire" was predicated on the belief that pain inflicted on the image was transferred to and experienced by the devil. Representation and referent coexist symbiotically with the latter suffering agonies inflicted on the former. Because in this form of exorcism the image functioned as a surrogate for, rather than as a symbol of, something, the rite was vulnerable to Protestant attack. Samuel Harsnett (1561–1631) was among those who took aim.

Citing the case of Sara Williams in *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, also known as *Booke of Miracles* (1603), Harsnett, a vocal skeptic of reports of diabolical possession, used the burning of the devil's effigy as a pitiable example of the common man's susceptibility to fakery, a demonstration of humanity's all-too-willing acceptance as truth of what is obviously a staged lie. Confronted by the devil's refusal to disclose his name, the exorcist, says Harsnett, resorts to drawing an effigy of the demon "upon a peece of paper, the picture of a vice in a play, and the same to be burned with hallowed brimstone, whereat the devil cryed out at being grievously tormented."⁸⁹ Reflecting the contention of Menghi, Visconti, and others, Harsnett's diatribe suggests that many viewed the destruction of the devil's image to be an act rife with remedial efficacy. In truth, he said, it was nothing more than theatrical deception. In fact, the belief that harm done to an image of Satan had restorative value was by this date centuries old. If exorcism can be seen as demonstrating this value for the afflicted

individual, then the burning of heretics capped with miters bearing the devil's portrait, no matter how cryptically rendered, can be seen as revealing its value for the community. This is perhaps most vividly conveyed by the notorious witch trials that took place in the Burgundian city of Arras in 1459–60.

Following imprisonment, torture, and trial, a group of alleged heretics that included two prostitutes, a brothel owner, the bishop's personal barber, and the corpse of a sergeant for the town's council (he had been found strangled and hanged in his cell) was brought before the citizenry of Arras for public sentencing and execution in early May 1460. Assembled on a makeshift stage erected before the bishop's palace, the accused *vaudois* presented quite a spectacle. While in prison, they had been ordered to make a paper miter on which they were to paint or draw a person, clearly intended to be self-referential, kneeling before the devil, whom they were accused of worshiping and with whom they were charged to have consorted.⁹⁰ The so-called heretics appeared before the Arrageois wearing their *mitrés*. Found guilty as charged, all were condemned to death by fire. But the group brought before the townspeople did not include all of those arrested. Two others languished in prison. One, Hughes Aymery, remained in custody because he refused to give inquisitors the confession they needed to justify his execution despite being subjected to repeated and extreme torture. The circumstances explaining why Belotte Moucharde remained locked in her cell that May morning are more intriguing. Unlike the other *vaudois*, Moucharde, who is identified as a prostitute, had failed to complete the making and painting of her miter. Her failure to finish the assigned task was apparently viewed as significant. Why? Was it, as the prescription for "Exorcism by Fire" allows us to conclude, that to burn her without it would have been but a half measure, one that rid the community of an agent of evil, yet one that allowed Satan to remain unscathed? Only two things can be said with certainty about Belotte's case. First, Jacques DuClerq (ca. 1420–1501), whose memoir provides the only firsthand account of the incident, considered the unfinished devil-miter worthy of explanatory note regarding Belotte Moucharde's ultimate fate. Second, Moucharde was exonerated five months later.⁹¹ DuClerq's account of the incident allows only one conclusion to be drawn. An image, or rather its absence, had saved the life of Belotte Moucharde.

While the procedures for exorcism prescribed by Menghi and Visconti were authorized by the church, they, or more accurately the defined relationship between sign and signified that they acknowledge, raise uneasy questions. It is but a small step to move from the correspondence between Satan and image noted by Menghi and so stunningly demonstrated by the case of Belotte Moucharde, to one between a cultic image of the Madonna and the archetype to which it refers. Indeed, there is no dearth of sources that imply an equation of likeness exceeding visual similitude. *Libri dei miracoli* are full of miraculous

signs of equivalency suggesting that the Virgin is a living presence within her image. The face of the Madonna dell'Arco, for example, still exhibits the bruise it reportedly sustained when a ball was thrown at the fresco in anger, while the Madonna dei Miracoli at Lonigo still cradles her cheek, which, it is said, was stabbed by a passing brigand. Such signs of injury clearly deny the material substance of a man-made representation. Image transfigurations purportedly caused by physical assault raise an obvious question. If Menghi's and Visconti's devil suffers torments as its image burns and depictions of the Madonna bruise, bleed, and cry with physical blows and verbal abuse, then who or what was venerated by the votives that framed sacred images? Did ex-votos recognize *grazia* to have been bestowed by the imaged referent, or did they also recognize agency in the representation itself? Put another way, did these objects operate as signs of orthodox faith, as signs of superstitious belief, or both, slipping between one designation and the other? The document issued by the provincial Council of Malines offers one answer. "It is superstitious to expect any effect from anything, when such an effect cannot be produced by natural causes, by divine institutions, or by the ordination and approval of the Church."⁹² The final qualifying clause: "or by ordination and approval of the Church," is an important one. It is useful to read it in light of Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso*.

As archbishop of Bologna, Paleotti strived to realize the Council of Trent's mandate: "Bishops should teach with care that the faithful are instructed and strengthened by commemorating and frequently recalling the articles of our faith through the expression in pictures or other likenesses of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption." Rife with exegetical subtlety and historical justification, the *Discorso*, or rather the two completed books of the projected five, represents a part of that effort. While Paleotti identified four categories of viewers to be addressed – the uneducated and naïve (*idioti*), the learned (*letterati*), Christians (*spirituali*), and those responsible for image production (*pittori*) – he was particularly concerned with *idioti*, whom he believed to be especially susceptible to error. Concurring with the Tridentine assessment that most viewers are prone to see with the eyes of the body rather than with the more perspicacious eyes of the soul, he devoted considerable attention to *il verisimile*, stipulating accuracy in the depiction of sacred subjects. Artists, he asserted, were to represent biblical banquet and battle scenes true to their time and place. People living in the Holy Land at the time of Christ should not be portrayed in contemporary dress. Israelites should not brandish modern weaponry. Mary, the paragon of humility, should not be shown bejeweled nor should her modest home in Nazareth be rendered as if it were a palace in Rome.

Additionally, in the sixteenth chapter of book one, Paleotti offered a list of images that fall under the rubric "*sacre*."⁹³ The fifth of eight *varii modi* generally called sacred are those images in and through (*col mezzo loro*) which "God has

clearly worked signs and miracles.” In reading Paleotti’s explanatory description of the *segni e miracoli* that distinguish this group of works, it is important to remember that he recognized perception as a reflection of what the beholder sees as much as by the representation itself. Thus, in addition to such visible manifestations as the shedding of real tears or blood (*talora gittare vive lagrime degli occhi o goccioline di sangue*), and movements suggestive of life itself (*fare qualche movimento ... come fossero vive*), signs of sacrality can be born solely of a belief that there is in the sacred image or object some efficacious goodness that heals the sick, cures the blind, and protects the threatened from danger (*perché in esse si sarà evidentemente riconosciuta la bontà divina, che col mezzo loro avrà risanato in un momento infermi, resa la luce a ciechi e liberato altri diversi pericoli*). As testaments of *miracoli*, *ex-votos* – especially the narratives depicted on *tavolette votive* – offered visual commentary on the thaumaturge whose representation they were placed before and set against. But this structure of display also, and perhaps unavoidably, could be seen as a comment upon the encircled sacred image, an image that was repeatedly vivified by ritual. Thinking about so-called miracle-working images in the context of the signifying relationship they had with votive images and objects, it can be said at the very least that while agency was officially denied existence within the image itself, it nonetheless was, within the culturally prescribed framework of votive practices, imposed on it.

AFTERWORD

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, votive panel paintings had already been dismissed, at least by some, as things of inconsequence. Paolo Morigia, for example, described them as things of no consequence (*senza nota*). Until recently, this assessment was not seriously questioned. When thaumaturgic sites were routinely cleared of votive clutter, *tavolette votive* suffered the same fate as a crutch, a figurine of a pig or cow, or length of rope and links of chain. It is not difficult to understand how this history of disregard came about, especially when a popularly offered *tavoletta* (Figure 2) is viewed against a great *tavola* offered in gratitude for divine intervention by a member of the social elite (Figure 1). As material objects, early modern *tavolette* are humble things. As pictures, they are, with few exceptions, formulaic in composition and stylistically unremarkable. Many, having been painted on unprepared wooden surfaces or punctured when a votary nailed one panel atop another, are in a ruinous state. But these unassuming images should be neither ignored nor viewed with indifference, for within their original contexts of display these seemingly simple things were weighted with a complex of testamentary tasks. Critically, the *tavolette* that are the focus of this book performed several functions. They related stories of traumatic experience, documented life-saving miracles, reflected the upright character of donors, and attested the efficacy of the saint to whom they were given. They did so during a period in which cultic culture and the use of images, especially by the unlettered, came under scrutiny for signs of error.

To date, the attention paid to fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *tavolette votive* has focused most often on what these pictures can tell us about life in the early modern period. Far less consideration has been given to the manner by which these depictions of rescue and recovery actually convey to viewers the stories that explain why they were made, purchased, and placed before a holy relic or, with increasing frequency, hung beside a venerated image. Even less effort has been expended on placing *tavolette* in their original conditions and circumstances of display, a move that sheds light on how these pictures of traumatic experience not only accrued meaning in relationship to other images but also structured a wholly new narrative – or visual *vita* – around the cultic images they framed. Although recent scholarship has begun to look at ex-votos in the context of idolatry and reform, *immagini*, rather than *tavolette*, have figured in the discussion. I have attempted to insert votive panel paintings into the discourse and tried to expand the way we look at these popular ex-votos. One of the catalysts for my undertaking of this project was the repeated encounter with a scene that is familiar to anyone who frequents Italy's many churches or, for that matter, visits pilgrimage destinations in the United States like Chimayo, New Mexico. At these places one observes actions strikingly similar (if not exact) to those described hundreds of years ago in miracle books like Fra Arcangelo Domenici's *Compendio dell'istoria, miracoli e gratie della Madonna Santissima dell'Arco* and Athanasio Nelli's *Origine della Madonna della Quercia di Viterbo*. Clearly, devotionism did not stop when the early modern era gave way to the modern period. At Chimayo discarded crutches and wheelchairs abound, and, as is true of the area around Jacopo Sansovino's *Madonna del Parto* in Sant'Agostino (Figure 6), albums and boxes overflow with photographs and personal mementos. Today, as in centuries long past, some regard these assortments of ex-votos as signs of superstition. Others see them as signs of faith. Because of this continuum in practices and attitudes and not wanting to restate what already has been said, my conclusion takes the form of an afterword.

Consider the following. During the height of the Great Depression upward of three thousand men and women took part weekly in the novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in the Church of St. Philomena located in the east end of Pittsburgh. By the time Vatican II convened in 1962, the number of participants had dropped to less than a thousand.¹ As devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help continued to decline at St. Philomena's, dedication to Our Lady of the Roses, Mary Help of Mothers began its rise in the Brooklyn community of Bayside. Nearly two years after her professed vision of St. Thérèse of Lisieux on June 5, 1968, Mrs. Veronica Lueken reported an at-home visitation by the Madonna. On April 7, 1970, said Mrs. Lueken, Mary directed her to establish a shrine and organize vigils on the grounds of St. Bellarmine Church. In return, the Holy Mother pledged, again according to Mrs. Lueken, to visit her devotees. Mary's instructions were followed and, as she promised and using

the visionary Mrs. Lueken as a medium through which to communicate to the faithful, the Madonna made further visitations. Each appearance was witnessed by a burgeoning number of devotees. Despite an investigation into the matter by the Diocese of Brooklyn that resulted in a declaration that the Bayside visions “completely lacked authenticity,” devotionism continued.² Indeed, in opposition to a diocesan order to Catholics to “refrain from participating in the ‘vigil’” yet acquiescing to neighborhood complaints, the faithful moved the site of their activities from St. Bellarmine in Bayside to Flushing Meadows–Corona Park, located about sixteen kilometers east of Manhattan. There, on Friday evenings devotees “kneel or sit in folding lawn chairs and pray the rosary from 8:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. before an adorned five-foot statue of the Virgin Mary which stands on a modest slab of cement that marks the former Vatican Pavilion site, the very spot where Michelangelo’s *Pieta* was housed during the [1964] World’s Fair.”³

It is not my objective to attempt to explain the pietistic practices centered on either Our Lady of Perpetual Help or Our Lady of the Roses, Mary Help of Mothers. Neither do I wish to consider the rise and fall in popularity of these sites in the contexts of Max Weber’s theory of modern “disenchantment,” Robert Orsi’s understanding of “presence” in modern society, or the “dramatic cultural and social changes” that opened alternative paths to crisis resolution that Timothy Kelly and Joseph Kelly propose as a cause for the decrease in devotees to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. My purpose is simply to point out just how familiar all of this sounds. Certainly, the inverse relationship of popularity existing between the Pittsburgh and Bayside sites brings to mind Francesco Sacchetti’s observation of similar vacillating behaviors by “foolish” Florentines who, he says, ran from the shrine of one miracle-working saint to another. As for diocesan efforts to evaluate the authenticity of the miraculous apparition of Our Lady of the Roses, one inevitably reflects on the inquisitorial hearings surrounding Mariolo Homodei’s encounter with the Virgin in 1504 or the one that followed Donna Laura’s claim in 1581 that the marble statue of the Madonna of San Bernardo conversed with her, to name but two such scenarios. Similarly, the supportive claims of devotees of Bayside’s Lady of the Roses echo those of “the great multitude” who in 1399 verified publicly what had first been witnessed by a sole resident of Terra di Portovenere within the privacy of the home – namely, the miraculous transfiguration of a hand-colored woodblock print. Reflecting on events taking place at Flushing Meadows–Corona Park and citing Don Yoder, Daniel Wojcik put it this way. “The Bayside phenomenon exemplifies [a] ... definition of folk religion as religious beliefs and practices expressed ‘apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of official religion.’” Being neither “mediated by a priest or by official religious texts,” behaviors performed by Baysiders – indeed, those enacted centuries earlier at numerous sites throughout the Italian

Peninsula – exist to some extent “outside the sanction of ecclesiastical authority and [are] based on personal needs and experiences rather than prescribed by institutional doctrines.” The sacred is “directly accessible to all,” the miracles that emanate from it highly personal in nature but shared with and comprehended by members of the community.⁴

The point is driven home by ex-votos. Like Caterina Parmigiana, who in the early years of the seventeenth-century Paolo Morigia recorded as having deposited a pair of no-longer-needed crutches at Caravaggio’s Sanctuary of the Madonna del Fonte, twenty-first-century devotees of the Madonna of Chimayo leave crutches, wheelchairs, and all sorts of prostheses at the New Mexican shrine known popularly as the Lourdes of America. In contrast to metal and waxen casts of human anatomy, which can be understood to operate “according to the logic of substitution,” crutches and similar objects have a physical association with donors that lends them a particular eloquence when it comes to attesting the miraculous.⁵ As Georges Didi-Huberman has argued, these things actually touched the donor’s “site of suffering.” Moreover, they could not have been left on site if they were still needed by the votary, which is to say, they provide tangible evidence of a miraculous restoration of mobility, the healing of a wound, or some other cure.⁶ Like *tavolette votive* of the early modern period, contemporary votive images have representational value by reason of their capacity to visualize their *raison d’être*, usually by photographic means. But there is, as Irene Small points out, a notable difference between contemporary votive photos and sixteenth-century votive panel paintings. “With a photograph, one could no longer picture the agent of intercession.”⁷ This is not to say that the absence of the visualized Madonna or some other saint in pietistic communion with the petitioner renders contemporary votive images less personal than their early modern counterparts. It is to suggest instead that new mediums have altered how individualism is expressed. If in the past a devotional dialogue was conveyed through the depiction of both the supplicant and the solicited saint, now photographic ex-votos, some of which attest a miraculous cure by pairing a before and after picture of the petitioner, function as an “indexical trace, that *this* body had witnessed divine grace.” Viewing these photographic images in this way brings to mind Roland Barthes’s contention: “Every photograph is a certificate of presence.”⁸

Photographic votive images do more than assert *praesentia*. In addition to pointing to an intercessor’s efficacy, they direct attention to the votary. Photographs of wounds and deformities collapse modes of painted and sculptural representation through a focus on the anatomy of a recognizable individual. In this way, they go beyond the generalization of generic waxen casts of legs, hands, and internal organs by in essence updating the self-proclaiming “Io” included on so many early *tavolette* inscriptions. The declarative, self-reflexive function of photographic votives is not the only role played by photographic

images in popular pietistic practices. In some cases, including the veneration of Bayside's Our Lady of the Roses, photographs are used like contact relics. The Polaroid photographs taken by attendees at the weekly vigils in Flushing Meadows–Corona Park speak to this extended efficacy. According to Wojcik, "Baysiders have ritualized the magical and apparitional qualities" of the technology, maintaining that the "filmic membranes released from their cameras" provides "conclusive documentation" of supernatural presence.⁹ In earlier centuries, supernatural presence was documented by popular prints illustrating a myriad of miracles. Although pilgrims typically purchased these prints as mementos, there were cases in which a purchased image was consciously touched to the sacred representation and through that contact believed to have acquired some of the efficacy of the original. Just as Giuliano di Francesco Guizzelmi (1446–1518) took reproduced images of the Madonna delle Carceri into the Tuscan countryside as curative contact images, so too have Polaroid photographs of Our Lady of the Roses been credited with the ability to heal those sick in mind and body.

It has been proposed that votive panels painted for popular consumption should be considered collectively as an autonomous "genre of art" with "specific aesthetic principles" parallel to those of other, nonpopular forms of artistic production.¹⁰ I am not at all sure that this would be a wise move given the obvious dependency *tavolette* have on the episodic vignettes on *vita* icons and historiated altarpiece predellas. The visual vocabularies of these "genres of art" overlap one another. Moreover, it seems clear that votive panel pictures worked in concert with more masterfully rendered and monumental works of art, each one pointedly referencing and constituting the other, and both enlivened through the devotional actions that took place around them. As Robert Maniura states, "Not only could people in the period recognize a relationship between votive images at a shrine and other 'portrait' images, they could recognize them as temporally situated things and think about them in constructive ways."¹¹ Given their collusion in the production of meaning, it is ill-advised to isolate one from the other. Votive images and objects, cultic figures and practices form a Gordian knot that perhaps should not be severed but appreciated for its indivisibility.

Throughout this book I have argued that the purposeful value of *tavolette votive* as objects within a complex of actions and things was manifold. Seen and used by Catholics of all social strata, they functioned as testimonial documents, related stories of life experiences, reflected on the spiritual and ethical rectitude of their donors, and promoted a saint or a sacred site. In thinking back over this and in considering their enduring role in acknowledging a connection between the visibly present and the indiscernibly absent, between subject and object, I am struck by the dynamics of usage that militates against isolating these humble images from the practices attending their donation and the

other images and objects woven into the fabric of their display. Ex-votos were and are relational things and therefore should be considered in the context of specific cultural moments. At the same time, it must be admitted that their long and continuing history as well as their resistance to social stratification challenges viewing them in too restrictive a manner. We can learn much from these images if we ease the fixity of long-standing art-historical divides.

NOTES

CHAPTER I. DIALOGUES OF DEVOTION: AN INTRODUCTION

- 1 The inscription appears on the panel with a portrait of Carondelet in prayer facing, on the pendant panel, the Virgin and Child. *Man, Myth, and Sensual Pleasures: Jan Gossart's Renaissance; The Complete Works*, ed. Maryan W. Ainsworth (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), 245–49, cat. no. 40.
- 2 For a discussion of the “attention-in-prayer topos,” see Robert W. Gaston, “Attention in Court: Visual Decorum in Medieval Prayer Theory and Early Italian Art,” in *Visions of Holiness: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrew Ladis and Shelley E. Zuraw (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2001), 137–62.
- 3 According to Bourne, *Francesco II Gonzaga*, 72, Donesmondi's narrative “reads more like a chivalric fairy tale than a factual description” of events. As Bourne, 83, notes, the installation of Mantegna's painting was a well-choreographed event staged by Isabella and Federico's brother, Sigismondo (Federico himself being away at battle). Isabella “appointed her confessor, Pietro da Canneto, to deliver a sermon to the people gathered outside the little church prior to the installation of Mantegna's altarpiece there. Reminding the crowd that it had been the ‘glorious Virgin’ who one year earlier saved Francesco ‘from so many dangers,’ Da Canneto moved the entire crowd to ‘pray together with one voice’ for his continued salvation.... Referring to Mantegna's altarpiece, Francesco's secretary Antimaco remarked that the crowd ‘could not get enough of seeing such a noble work, especially (aside from the image of the Virgin) the portrait of Your Most Illustrious Lordship, which moved everyone to tears.’” Within hours, vast quantities of candles and votive figurines began to accumulate at the site.
- For an exhaustive account of events and an in-depth analysis of the artworks commissioned to commemorate them, see Bourne's discussion in chapter 2, “‘Victory’ as Propaganda: The Battle of Fornovo and Its Artistic Aftermath,” 65–99.
- 4 Ippolito Donesmondi, *Dell'istoria ecclesiastica di Mantova*, 1613–16, as cited in Bourne, *Francesco II Gonzaga*, 72–73. Francesco's building of the church of Sta. Maria della Vittoria, dedication of Mantegna's altarpiece, and offering of armor was not the first time the marquis honored the Madonna for intervening with God on his behalf. Having survived a riding accident early in his reign, he founded on the site of the mishap the convent Sta. Maria dei Miracoli in gratitude for salvation.
- 5 As Bacci, “*Pro remedio animae*,” 19; Holmes, “Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence,” 439; and others note, image transfigurations expressed efficacy through hierophany, which is the manifestation of sacred immanence through some observable sign such as weeping, moving, bleeding, or otherwise exhibiting a sign of living presence. Holmes expands her discussion in chapter 6 of her book *Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence*, which is to be published in November 2013 by Yale University Press. “Stories of relics that bleed, or flower, or shine with light when fragmented are frequent in the later Middle Ages, although found earlier.” Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 128.
- 6 Giovanni Domenico Bertani, *L'istoria della gloriosa imagine della Madonna di Lonigo, posta nella chiesa alter volte nominata di S. Pietro Lamentese* (Verona: A. Tamo, 1605).
- 7 See note 3.
- 8 As Amanda Lille, “The Patronage of Villa Chapels and Oratories near Florence: A Typology of Private Religion,” in *With and Without the Medici: Studies in Tuscan Art and Patronage, 1434–1530*, ed. Eckart Mrachland and

- Alison Wright (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 32, has argued, demonstrable piety signaled social respectability.
- 9 Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 58. Also see John Bossy, "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700," *Past and Present*, 100 (1983), 29–61, esp. 32–33; and Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development (Missarum sollemnia)*, 2 vols., trans. Francis A. Brunner (New York: Benziger, 1951–55).
 - 10 Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 58.
 - 11 Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 112, notes that "late medieval miracle accounts came increasingly to emphasize actions at a distance – that is, healings and revelations that occur because visions are seen or vows made. Adherents tended to visit shrines after miracles occurred, rather than seeking them to ask there, in that place, for the saint's aid in times of distress." It is impossible to know how on-site visits affected the pious, for as Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, 58, rightly noted, "It is notoriously difficult to assess how well ordinary people of the late medieval period understood the theological significance of the mass – or indeed, the basic tenets of their faith in general." Nonetheless, the conventional use of the informal *tu* in penitential prayer and votive supplication suggests a belief in the intimacy of connectedness to God by the faithful. See chapter 7 in Holmes's forthcoming *Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence*, in which she discusses Lorenzo di Jacopo degli Obizzi's penitential prayer, ca. 1485, in *Miracoli della Vergine Maria delle Carceri*. Holmes, "Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence," 464, n. 64, publishes the poem in full. I am exceedingly grateful to Megan Holmes for sharing her completed manuscript with me prior to its publication. As discussed in the following chapter, the significance of the *tu* form is paralleled in votive panel inscriptions, which use *io* in their address to the intercessor.
 - 12 Two examples convey the propitious nature of works offered *pro remedio animae*. The first is Carlo Crivelli's *Madonna and Child with SS. Francis and Sebastian and Donor*, Oradea Becchetti, 1491, in London's National Gallery. The commission is explained by the inscription that appears along the painting's lower edge, rendered as if it had been chiseled into stone rather than painted on panel; "Oradea of Giovanni dedicated this in compassion for her forebears and descendants, with not a little of her own money, to bountiful Mary, source of all consolation." See Catherine E. King, *Renaissance Women Patrons* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 148–50. The second is referenced in the *ricordanza*, or record book, of Antonio di Lionardo Rustichi. On April 8, 1419, Antonio noted moneys spent for a painting of a figure of St. Giovanni Gualberto, a scene from the saint's life, and his own coat of arms on a pier in the Florentine church of San Romeo "per remedio del anime de nostrj passatj" – that is, for the redemption of the souls of his ancestors. See Rubin, *Images and Identity*, 9–10.
 - 13 Format is a defining feature. The verticality of altarpieces allowed congregants to see what the inaudible words recited by clergy during the sacrament of the Eucharist proclaimed: the salvific presence of the sacramental body.
 - 14 Rona Goffen, "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas," *Art Bulletin*, 57 (1975), 511. Barbarigo's two daughters were among the sisters of Sta. Maria degli Angeli.
 - 15 Before ca. 1400, small-scale devotional panel paintings were common in various forms: that of a single panel painting, a diptych, or a triptych. The embellishment of the backs of these paintings indicates that they were also movable and therefore most likely were set on a horizontal surface rather than affixed to a vertical wall. Victor M. Schmidt, "Painting and Individual Devotion in Late Medieval Italy: The Case of Saint Catherine of Alexandria," in *Visions of Holiness: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrew W. Ladis and Shelley E. Zuraw (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2001), 31–32. Paintings that represent the placement of paintings within the domestic interior also reveal the positioning of devotional works in *camere*. See Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400–1600* (London: V & A, 1991), 261–68.
 - 16 Peter Humfrey, *Giovanni Battista Moroni: Renaissance Portraitist* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 2000), 61–62.
 - 17 Anabel Thomas, *The Painter's Pratica in Renaissance Tuscany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 286–87.

- 18 Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (1582), bk. 1, chap. 16, in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 2:198.
- 19 Still, it is worth noting that the Virgin is sometimes represented in diminutive scale in comparison to her devotee, a compositional move that “establishes her as an image within an image.” Donal Cooper, “Devotion,” in *At Home in the Renaissance*, ed. Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, 190.
- 20 Millard Meiss, “An Early Altarpiece from the Cathedral of Florence,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s., 12 (1954), 302–17. Other artists took up the unusual subject; see for example, the Master of Sherman Predella in Laurence Kanter and Pia Palladino, *Fra Angelico* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 298–99, cat. no. 58. Also see http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/collection_database/the_cloisters/theintercessionofchrist, which is the source of the translation given here (accessed Dec. 13, 2010). I am grateful to Megan Holmes and Christopher Wood who discussed with me the many challenges posed by this work, which is unusual by reason of medium, scale, and format, factors that have led some to conclude that it was initially a processional work.
- 21 Bernard of Clairvaux, Commentary on the Song of Songs 7.4, as cited in Michael W. Cole, *Ambitious Form: Giambologna, Ammanati, and Danti in Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 223–24. For the theme of double intercession, see D. Koepplin, “Intercession Mariä und Christi vor Gottvater,” in *Lexicon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), 2: cols. 346–52.
- 22 Bernardino of Siena, *Opera omnia*, 2:158, as cited in Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*, 123–24.
- 23 Bernardino of Busti, *Mariale*, sermon 1, “On the Nativity of Mary,” part. 3, as cited in Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*, 109–10. In accordance with grammar, I have altered Ellington’s translation of the phrase *mediatrix nostre intercessionis* from “our mediator of intercession” to the “mediator of our intercession.” Since *intercessionis* is singular, feminine, and in the genitive, *nostre* must apply to this noun. I am grateful to the anonymous reader of my manuscript for questioning the translation and to Joanna Schmitz for her assistance in correcting it.
- 24 See the section “Totaling the Evidence: Production, Preservation, and Destruction” in Chapter II.
- 25 Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de pittori circa l’istorie*, in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 2:110–11.
- 26 Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 13–14, discusses the *modo umil* as defined in the writings of Vittoria Colonna as well as by Gilio.
- 27 Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 51.
- 28 Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy*, 124–25.
- 29 Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* (1582), bk. 1, chap. 16, in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 2:197–201, identifies eight types of images worthy of the designation *sacra*. In the fifth category Paleotti, 198, includes works that manifested signs (*segni*) of life by weeping, bleeding, and the like, as well as those associated with affecting cures (*che col mezzo loro avra risanato in un momento infermi, resa la luce a ciechi e liberato altri da diversi pericoli*).
- 30 Klaus Kruger, “Authenticity and Fiction: On the Pictorial Construction of Inner Presence in Early Modern Italy,” in *Image and Imagination of the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Reindert L. Falkenburg, Walter S. Melion, and Todd M. Richardson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 39.
- 31 The statement was made in reference to the Madonna of Loreto. Biondo and White, *Italy Illuminated*, region 5, chap. 17, 263–64. Biondo calls the site “the most famous in Italy.” Indeed, it has long held primacy among Marian shrines. It is the first of more than twelve hundred Marian shrines included in the four volumes of Wilhelm Gumpfenberg’s *Atlas Marianus: quo sanctae dei genetricis Mariae imaginum miraculosarum origins Duodecim Historiarum Centuriis explicantur*, 1657. It maintained the privilege of first place, introducing the thousand shrines included in Alessandro Vinciotti, *I mille santuari Mariani d’Italia illustrati* (Roma: Associazione Santuari Mariani, 1960).
- 32 As Armstrong, *The Power of Presence*, 10–11, might put it, the causal power of a *tavoletta* or votive offering was not perceived in the image or object as a skillfully executed “work-of-

art” – as a presence, or mark, of excellence – but rather in the validating role it performed in affirming *praesentia* – the affecting presence of identity.

- 33 A comprehensive list cannot be given here. It simply would be too long. However, in addition to sources already referenced and including the seminal studies by Warburg, “Bildkunst und Florentinisches Bürgertum,” and Kriss-Rettenbeck, *Ex Voto*, as well as his *Das Votivbild* (Munich: H. Rinn, 1958), and “Geformtes Wachs,” *Atlantis*, 12 (1960), 599–613; and the more recent and important contributions by Bacci, “*Pro remedio animae*”; and Holmes, “Ex-votos: Materiality, Memory, and Cult,” in *The Idol in the Age of Art*, ed. Cole and Zorach, see Anne-Marie Bautier, “Typologie des ex-voto mentionnés dans les texts antérieurs à 1200,” in *Actes du Congrès national des sociétés savants. I. La piété populaire au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Bibliothèque National, 1977), 262–81; Arnolfo Ciarrocchi and Ermanno Mori, *Tavolette votive italiane* (Udine: Doretti, 1960); Alberto Vecchi, “Per la lettura delle tavolette votive,” *Studia patavina*, 21 (1974), 602–21; Manfred Brauneck, Hildegard Brauneck, and Wulf Brackrock, *Religiöse Volkskunst. Votivgaben, Andachtsbilder, Hinterglas, Rosenkranz, Amulette* (Cologne: Dumont, 1978); Pierre-André Sigal, *L’homme et le miracle dans la France médiévale: XIe–XIIe siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1985); David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), esp. 136–60; Fabio Bisogni, “Ex voto e la scultura in cera nel tardo medioevo,” in *Visions of Holiness: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrew Ladis and Shelley E. Zuraw (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2001), 67–91; and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ex voto: images, organs, temps* (Paris: Bayard, 2006). Paolo Toschi, *Bibliografia degli ex-voto italiani* (Florence: Olschki, 1971), supplies a list of sources prior to 1970. Typically, the literature on *tavolette* is more descriptive than analytical. Sources are cited throughout. For a typical sixteenth-century list of votive objects, see Angelo Turchini, “Ex voto e tavolette votive,” in *Lo straordinario e il quotidiano*, ed. Turchini, 13. Among the listed items in Santa Maria Maggiore, Bergamo, in 1575, were “Uno santo Iosepho; Una imagine della Madonna con il

bambino in braccio; Una mamilla d’argento, uno ochio solo; Un baston d’argento, doi testicoli; ... Una statua d’omo in genocchione; ... Uno diadema per il puttino d’argento; ... Uno Agnus Dei d’argento con una imagine de la Madonna; Una radice di corallo con manico d’argento; ... Un ferro da cavallo picciolino d’argento.”

- 34 See, for example, Gunter Grimm, *Rezeptionsgeschichte: Grundlegung einer Theorie mit Analysen und Bibliographie* (Munich: W. Fink, 1977), 117–44; Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*; Quentin Skinner, “Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts,” *New Literary History*, 3 (1972), 393–408; and Marty P. Thompson, “Reception Theory and the Interpretation of Historical Meaning,” *History and Theory*, 32 (1993), 248–72.
- 35 Peter Parshall, “The Art of Memory and the Passion,” *Art Bulletin*, 81 (1999), 464. Although texts rather than images are the focus, Steven Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?” *Representations*, 103 (2008), 1–29, suggests that at least some of the obstacles presented by temporal distance can be overcome.
- 36 On this point, see Richard Kieckhefer, “The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic,” *American Historical Review*, 99 (1994), 832.
- 37 Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1970); and Paul de Man, introduction to Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xii.
- 38 Although Jones is not referring to the practices examined here, her term is apt. Pamela M. Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 1.

CHAPTER II. TAVOLETTE VOTIVE: FORM, FUNCTION, CONTEXT

- 1 Luca Landucci, *A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516 by Luca Landucci Continued by an Anonymous Writer until 1542*, trans. Alice De Rosen Jervis (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1927), 222–23.
- 2 Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 13v.
- 3 For an in-depth discussion of the Cavaletti Chapel and Caravaggio’s *Madonna of Loreto*, see Jones, *Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni*, 75–136.

- 4 The title of the work, *Madonna del Parto*, comes from an inscription on the tabernacle frieze. The designation *Madonna del Sasso* has been documented since the seventeenth century. See Joachim Poeschke, *Michaelangelo and His World: Sculpture of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 147–48, cat. no. 138. As Michael Cole and Rebecca Zorach point out in their introduction to *The Idol in the Age of Art*, 4, Jacopo's father, Andrea Sansovino, had earlier completed a marble *Madonna and Child with St. Anne* for the same church. Between the unveiling of Andrea's work in 1512 and "the 1524 publication of a book of poems praising the work as an 'idol,'" the younger Sansovino's work was carved. Here, however, "idol" refers not to the "association of artworks with the demonic and the divine" but rather to the aesthetization of "works of men's hands." In his review of *The Idol in the Age of Art*, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 63 (2010), 584, Alexander Nagel states that this appreciative view of artworks was "a conceptual reframing more powerful and thoroughgoing than the most violent iconoclasm." Citing Michael Camille (*The Gothic Idol*, 1989) and quoting Joseph Koerner (*Reformation of the Image*, 2004), Cole and Zorach remind us, that "the history of 'the idol' may not be quite the same as the history of 'idolatry.' Idolatry ... is 'an accusation, not a belief'" (4).
- 5 For a concise definition of ex-voto, see the entry by Lenz Kriss-Rettenbeck in Grove Art Online, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com>, accessed Jan. 2, 2010. Although the term can also mean "to wish for," its use here refers to the fulfillment of a vow following a perceived act of intercession and not an act or object offered to a potential intercessor with the hope of having a favor of grace bestowed in the future. The phrase *votum feci, gratiam accepi*, or some variant that appears on numerous votive tablets points to the post-intercession time frame. See Kriss-Rettenbeck, *Das Votivbild*. Terms for vows in ancient Latin texts point to a distinction between vows made by an individual with *imperium* on behalf of the populace (*vota nuncupata*) and one made by an individual for personal reasons (*devotio*). Adam Ziolkowski, *The Temples of Mid-Republican Rome and Their Historical and Topographical Context* (Rome: Bretschneider, 1992), 195–98. The term *tavolette* also refers to small panels used to console convicts in the moments immediately preceding execution. For discussions of *tavolette* of this kind, see, for example, the seminal studies by Samuel Y. Edgerton, "Maniera and Mannaia: 'Decorum' and Decapitation in the Sixteenth Century," in *The Meaning of Mannerism*, ed. Franklin Westcott Robinson and Stephen G. Nicholas, Jr. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1972), 67–103; and "A Little Known 'Purpose of Art' in the Italian Renaissance," *Art History*, 2 (1979), 45–61; Larry J. Feinberg, "Imagination all Compact: Tavolette and Confraternity Rituals for the Condemned in Renaissance Italy," *Apollo*, 161 (2005), 48–57; and Massimo Ferretti, "In Your Face: Paintings for the Condemned in Renaissance Italy," in *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008), 79–97.
- 6 Megan Holmes, "Ex-votos: Materiality, Memory, and Cult," in *The Idol in the Age of Art*, ed. Cole and Zorach, 160. Holmes does not discuss votive panel paintings; nonetheless her description of the sentiments behind the donation of anatomized and configured wax ex-votos is applicable here.
- 7 Counterweights and counterlengths frequently took the form of candles, some braided in order to equal height when unbraided. Both forms are cited as ex-votos in the canonization hearings of Nicholas of Tolentino. According to Hugo Van Der Velden, "Medici Votive Images and the Scope and Limits of Likeness," in *The Image and the Individual: Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum, 1998), 129, "a denomination like *fallimagini* is first to be found in the archives of SS. Annunziata [Florence] in 1438, referring to Zanobi, Giuliano and Benintendi, 'che fanno le ymagine.'" Interestingly, the date coincides with the reemergence of *tavolette* as a votive form. In his life of Andrea del Verrocchio, Vasari refers to effigies of Lorenzo de' Medici made by Orsino Benintendi as *ritratti dal vivo*. See Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori*, in *Le opere*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1906), 3:373–74. In the absence of extant painted wax votive effigies from the period, the question of individualization remains an open one. The most famed member of the Benintendi, Orsino

allegedly made the vividly lifelike votive images of Lorenzo de' Medici following his survival of the Pazzi Conspiracy on April 26, 1478. In addition to Vasari, see Julius von Schlosser, "Geschichte der Porträtbildnerei in Wachs. Ein Versuch," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, 29 (1911), 171–258, which is now available in an English translation by James Michael Loughride in *Ephemeral Bodies: Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 171–314; and Guido Mazzoni, *I bñti della SS. Annunziata in Firenze: curiosità storica* (Florence: F. Le Monnier, 1923); and Gino Masi, "La ceroplastica in Firenze nei secoli xv–xvi e la famiglia Benintendi," *Rivista d'arte*, 9 (1916–18), 124–42. Referencing the three effigies noted by Vasari as well as an early seventeenth-century reference to his donation of a silver votive image of himself kneeling that was deposited at the renowned shrine of Santa Maria di Loreto, Kate Lowe makes the following observation. "The fact that all three of the large ex-votos discussed by Vasari went to famous shrines indicates that Lorenzo was not immune to considerations of miraculous intercession. It is also interesting to note that although the wax images were perceived as being motivated at least in part by political considerations, they survived until Vasari's day, unlike some of the contemporary ex-votos made of silver." Kate Lowe, "Lorenzo's 'Presence' at Churches, Convents and Shrines in and outside Florence," in *Lorenzo the Magnificent, Culture and Politics*, ed. Michael Mallett and Nicholas Mann (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1996), 31–32. According to Robert Maniura, "Ex Votos, Art and Pious Performance," 420, "Even if some of the wax votive images were portrait likenesses, this may represent only one of a range of options: many of them may have been generic figures." Among popular votives, representations of arms, legs, heads, or other parts of the anatomy cast in wax were the most common. Their presence is attested by numerous *libri dei miracoli*, canonization records, and is also recorded in popular literature. For the latter, see for example the story of Ser Ciappelletto in Boccaccio, *Decameron* (Milan: Gherardo Casini, 1966), 41 (giornata prima: novella prima): "Then, night having come, he was buried ... and hand in hand people came and lit candles

[accender lumi] for him and adored him, and the next day they began to make votive offerings [*le immagini della cera*] and make images of him from the wax about the chapel in fulfillment of their promises."

- 8 Roberta Panzanelli, ed., *The Colors of Life: Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum and Getty Research Institute, 2008), cat. no. 1, 100–1. Life-size effigies were on occasion dressed in real clothes that had been dipped into wax.
- 9 Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 110v (miracle no. 49): Francesco "ricevuta la grazia, e visitato il Santo Tempio, lasciò ... una tavoletta, secondo la possibilità sua espicante il miracolo"; 127v (miracle no. 57): Domenico di Piero "lasciò ... una tavoletta, in cui sta dipinto il descritto miracolo"; 55v (miracle 22): an unnamed donor placed on the altar "una bella tavoletta, nella quale era dipinto il già dichiarato miracolo." I am indebted to Megan Holmes for consulting with me on these entries.
- 10 The phrase describes an *effigie* of Christ. Elia Cavriolo, *Delle historie Bresciane libri dodeci*, 248.
- 11 For a corpus of images of pilgrims at saints' tombs, see Michele Tomasi, "Il modello Antoniano: Tomb di santi su colonne o su cariatidi in area veneta nel trecento," *Il Santo*, 48 (2008), 123–44.
- 12 Hahn, "Seeing and Believing: The Construction of Sanctity in Early Medieval Saints' Shrines." Increasingly, pilgrims, who in the past were encouraged to touch the sacred, were allowed to do little more than peer through a *fenestrella*.
- 13 Leonardo da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting* [*Codex Urbinas Latinus 1270*], 2:3–4 (translation, 1:20).
- 14 Megan Holmes, "The Framing and Veiling of Miracle-Working Images," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America, Montreal, 2011; Alessandro Nova, "Hangings, Curtains, and Shutters of Sixteenth-Century Lombard Altarpieces," in *Italian Altarpieces, 1250–1550*, ed. Borsook and Gioffredi, 177–89. But as Holmes, "Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence," 443–44, also notes, some looked skeptically at enshrinement structures. Agnolo Firenzuola "mused that there was really nothing intrinsically different between the celebrated *Annunciation* at SS. Annunziata and a similar image in nearby San Marco that would justify

- the higher level of veneration accorded the Annunziata fresco. Cult value, he implied, was purely a function of ‘the manner of displaying it with so much ostentation.’”
- 15 Occhioni, *Il processo*, 455, CCXII testis.
 - 16 Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 112r (miracle no. 49) and 55v (miracle no. 22). The woodcut illustrations in Ferrini reflect the compositional structure and imagery typical of votive panel paintings and presumably were based upon no-longer-extant examples.
 - 17 Trexler, “Ritual Behavior in Renaissance Florence,” 397.
 - 18 Viterbo, Archivio Storico del Convento di S. Maria della Quercia, vol. 115c (Ricordanze della Sindacheria, dal 1525 al 1719), 39v. By 1561, the precinct before the sanctuary had about three hundred shops (vol. 115c. 41v). Today, these shops sell herbal soaps, pottery, and similar things.
 - 19 Simona Tozzo, “Gli ex voto di Madonna di Lonigo: storia di una devozione,” in *Le tavolette votive della Madonna dei Miracoli di Lonigo*, 22.
 - 20 See note 96.
 - 21 Grimaldi and Sordi, *La villa di Santa Maria di Loreto*, 31–32.
 - 22 The panel is discussed in greater depth in [Chapter IV](#), “Narrative Modes.”
 - 23 Deoclecio Redig de Campos, “L’ex-voto dell’Inghirami al Laterano,” in *Rendiconti*, Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia, ser. 3, 29 (1958), 171–80; and Ingrid D. Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance: Ancients and Moderns in Sixteenth-Century Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 151–52.
 - 24 Archival and published materials recount the history. For the later, see Ciprini, *La Madonna della Quercia*, 1:17: “Era nel tenimento di Viterbo intra le vigne nella contrada del Mandriale uno devota figura della beata Vergine pinta una tegula, quale fece pingere un bon omo chiamato Battista Chiavaro da un pintore mastro Martello detto Monetto. Eppo Battista portò e conficcò questa tegula in una quercia nella strada publica, per andare a Bagnaia. Usica tal quercia d’una vigna della cappella della Madonna di Sancta Maria Nova, cioè della cappella di Sancta Niccolo di Viterbo ...” I am grateful to Gianfrancesco Ciprini for showing me the shrine’s *tavolette* and sharing his vast information about the site. Among the latter, see *Bellissimo miracolo della Gloriosa Vergine Maria SS.ma della Quercia di Viterbo* (Viterbo: Giulio de’Giulj con licenza de’Superiori, n.d.).
 - 25 Nelli, *Origine della Madonna della Quercia di Viterbo*, 6v–7r. For a survey of the *tavolette*, see Carosi and Ciprini, *Gli ex-voto del santuario della Madonna della Quercia*.
 - 26 Cavriolo, *Delle historie Bresciane libri dodici*, 248: “Haveresti visto camicie, toniche, vesti e cinture di grandissimo prezzo pendere dal muro, dall’altare et dal soffitato vicino a detta imagine. Perchè fu detto, che invocandosi per pura fede il Redentore subito guarivano gl’amalati da ogni infermità, in modo che ... di questa figura di Giesù Christo pareva attissimo remedio a tutti i mali.”
 - 27 Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 73.
 - 28 Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 2:198.
 - 29 The statement was made in reference to the Madonna of Loreto. Biondo and White, *Italy Illuminated*, region 5, chap. 17, 263–64. Biondo calls the site “the most famous in Italy.” Indeed, it has long held primacy among Marian shrines. It is the first of more than twelve hundred Marian shrines included in the four volumes of Gumpfenberg’s *Atlas Marianus: quo sanctae Dei genetricis Mariae imaginum miraculosarum*, 1657. It maintained the privilege of first place, introducing the thousand shrines included in Alessandro Vincinotti, *I mille santuari Mariani d’Italia illustrati* (Rome: Associazione Santuari Mariani, 1960). For early histories of the shrine, see Angelitta, *L’historia della traslatione della Santa Casa della Madonna a Loreto*; and Torsellino, *De l’historia della Santissima Casa della B.V. Maria di Loreto*. As is the case with other holy sites and as discussed later, religion and economics merged at Loreto, providing merchants access to a market expanded by pilgrims. See Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, 166–69; and Grimaldi, *Il Sacello della Santa Casa*, esp. 230–37. The Holy House did not arrive at Loreto from Nazareth without intermediary stops. Before settling in the woods of Loreto, it alighted first on the coast of Dalmatia, then elsewhere near Recanati.
 - 30 A letter from the abbot dated 1573 ordered the monks to halt the practice. Archivio San

- Nicola, 32/6, Biblioteca Egidiana, Tolentino. Stefano Papetti, “Gli ex voto: la ‘Sistina dei poveri,’” in Gatta, López, and Papetti, *Per grazia ricevuto: Gli ex voto del Museo di San Nicola a Tolentino*, 9, incorrectly cites the source. Alberto Vecchi, “Le tavolette e il Santuario,” in Vecchi, Lucco, and Puttin, *Tavolette votive Bellunesi*, 9, suggests that beyond this practical use, the trade advertised the shrine, bringing more pilgrims bearing gifts.
- 31 Angelitta, *L'istoria della traslatione della Santa Casa della Madonna a Loreto*, 74, reports merchants selling objects that were intended as both votives and souvenirs: rosaries; representations (*imagini*) of the Virgin, some sculpted (*scolpite*), others stamped on sheets of tin, silver, and gold; and candles made of white wax. The fresco depicting a pharmacy interior in the cycle at Castello di Issogne, Val d'Aosta, pictures cast wax votives (a hand, a foot, and a full figure) for sale side by side with elixers, herbs, and sponges. *Botteghe* located in Via San Gregorio Armeno in Naples's historic center just off Spaccanopoli, which continue to make and sell religious memorabilia and ex-votos, produced some of the panels donated to the Madonna dell'Arco.
- 32 The act of destruction is noted in Pietro Paolo Raffaelli's addition to the 1727 publication of Torsellino's *De l'istoria della Santissima Casa della B. V. Maria di Loreto*. This and other aspects of votive offerings are discussed in R. W. Lightbrown, “Ex-votos in Gold and Silver: A Forgotten Art,” *Burlington Magazine*, 121 (June 1979), 352–57.
- 33 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1249.
- 34 Franco Sacchetti, *I sermoni evangelici, le lettere ed altri scritti inediti o rari* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1857), 218–19. I am grateful to Megan Holmes, who so generously supplied me with this passage as well as its translation.
- 35 For the legend of the miraculously completed painting, see, among other sources, Francesco Bocchi, *Le bellezze della città di Firenze*, reprint of 1677 edition (Florence: Arnaldo Forni, 2004), 431–33. The event was considered to be the originating miracle of this miraculous image and therefore appears as such in Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 11–5r. I am grateful to Sara Matthews-Grieco for directing me to the Biblioteca Marucelliana's copy of this text. For the directive forbidding the placement of a “voto in figura che non fosse uomo di Repubblica,” see Ottavio Andreucci, *Il Fiorentino Istruito nella Chiesa della Nunziata di Firenze, Memoria storica* (Florence: M. Cellini, 1857), 86, and 80 for the reference noting that in 1630, 600 life-size, multimedia effigies were inventoried as well as at least 22,000 ex-voto in *carta pesta* (papier-mâché), and 3,600 paintings of miraculous events. Aby Warburg, “Bildkunst und Florentinisches Bürgtum, I: Domenico Ghirlandajo in Santa Trinita die Bildnisse des Lorenzo de' Medici und seiner Angehörigen” [1902], in A. Warburg, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1932), 116–19 (“Votivstatuen aus Wachs”). For early inventories, see Eugenio Casalini, “Un inventario inedito del secolo XV,” in Eugenio M. Casalini, *La SS. Annunziata di Firenze. Studi e documenti sulla chiesa e il convento* (Florence: Convento della SS. Annunziata, 1971), 73–128; Eugenio Casalini et al., *Tesori d'arte dell'Annunziata di Firenze* (Florence: Alinari, 1987). In addition to the sources cited in note 7, see Matthews-Grieco, “Media, Memory and the *Miracoli della SS. Annunziata*,” and Holmes, “Ex-votos: Materiality, Memory, and Cult,” in *The Idol in the Age of Art*, ed. Cole and Zorach, esp. 168–80.
- 36 During a moment of quiet imposed on the city by a quarantine intended to slow the spread of contagion in 1630, SS. Annunziata's figurative ex-votos were inspected for safety. Lowered from the roof beams, “a large number” were seen to have broken apart, “collapsed into themselves or otherwise deteriorated beyond the possibility of repair. The report on the state of affairs was noted by the Sacristan, Ferdinando Mancini. Matthews-Grieco, “Media, Memory and the *Miracoli della SS. Annunziata*,” 279.
- 37 Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 81r, 112r, 55v, 93v, 110v, and 127v.
- 38 “[P]arlando delle tavolette dipinte queste erano di sì gran numero, che tutte le muraglie delle cappelle ne erano parate e coperte; ingombravano tutti i pilastri dai capitelli in giù, ne erano parimente foderate tutte le porte della chiesa per dentro e di fuori e nel chiostrino (eccettuato dove son le storie di sì eccellenti pittori) tutto il restante era di quelle occupato, insino sopra i ferri cioè sopra le catene degli archi delle colonne. Ne contraì allora fina a tremila seicento.” Matthews-

- Grieco, “Media, Memory and the *Miracoli della SS. Annunziata*,” 278–79. To the number of painted tablets can be added some two thousand ex-votos in *cartapesta* (papier-mâché) and six hundred life-size effigies. See Warburg, “Bildkunst und Florentinisches Bürgertum,” 119; and Ottavio Andreucci, *Il fiorentino istruito nella chiesa della Nunziata di Firenze* (Florence: M. Cellini e C. alla Galilejana, 1857), 80. The deteriorated condition of many of the hanging ex-votos caused concern. It was feared that falling debris might injure those walking below.
- 39 For fifteenth- and sixteenth-century documents, including the verification of Gianetta’s vision, see Ziglioli, *Santa Maria del Fonte in Caravaggio*, 240–51.
- 40 Morigia, *Historia & origine della Famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 84. Today, none survives. On a visit to the site in the summer of 2010, I inquired about their whereabouts. Older members of the community recall a sanctuary at the mid-twentieth century filled with ex-votos of all kinds. They also remember their removal for stated reasons of safety and lament the fact they were never returned.
- 41 Biondo and White, *Italy Illuminated*, 263–64.
- 42 Holmes, “Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence,” 434, tracks the rapid rise of cults in Florence and Florentine territories. Between 1292 and 1600, more than forty image cults sprang up in the region.
- 43 Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 4. Also see Angelo Torre, “Il Consumo di devotioni; Rituali e potere nella Campagne Piemontesi nella Prima Meta del Settecento,” *Quaderni storici*, 20 (1985), 181–223.
- 44 Grimaldi and Sordi, *La villa di Santa Maria di Loreto*, 87.
- 45 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1247.
- 46 Hans Medick, “Missionaries in the Row Boat? Ethnological Ways of Knowing as a Challenge to Social History,” *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, 29/1 (1987), 98.
- 47 Angelitta, *L’historia della traslatione della Santa Casa della Madonna a Loreto*, 73–74. The appearance of the vernacular edition coincides with Orlando di Lasso’s setting to music the Litany of Loreto, a series of invocations recited every Saturday.
- 48 Guido Guerzoni, “‘Notae Divinae Ex Arte Compunctae’: Prime Impressioni sul Tatuaggio devozionale in Italia (XV–XIX),” *Micrologus*, 13 (2005), 418. I thank Alan Grieco for bringing Guerzoni’s article to my attention, which in turn directed me to these objects, each measuring about 5 by 8 centimeters, on a recent trip to the site. Not only is their number impressive, so too is the variety of patterns. Also see Floriano Grimaldi, *Loreto, Palazzo Apostolico* (Bologna: Calderini, 1977), 126–31. For a discussion of souvenirs, see Cynthia Hahn, “Loca Sancta Souvenirs: Sealing the Pilgrim’s Experience,” in *Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 85–96.
- 49 Domenici, *Compendio*, 37v (Miele, 129).
- 50 Jacobus da Voragine, *Legenda aurea: vulgo Historia lombardica dicta*, ed. Johann Georg Theodor Gräesse, 1890 repr. (Osnabrück: O. Zeller, 1969), 407 (cap. XCVI).
- 51 Grimaldi and Sordi, *La villa di Santa Maria di Loreto*, 31–32.
- 52 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1249.
- 53 Grimaldi and Sordi, *La villa di Santa Maria di Loreto*, 77.
- 54 Among the many discussions, see David S. Areford, “Multiplying the Sacred: The Fifteenth-Century Woodcut as Reproduction, Surrogate, Simulation,” in *The Woodcut in Fifteenth-Century Europe*, Studies in the History of Art, Symposium Papers LII, ed. Peter Parshall (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 119–53, fig. 3, which pictures St. Anthony Abbot surrounded by pilgrims and votive offerings is of particular interest here; and Robert Maniura, “The Miracles and Images of Santa Maria delle Carceri,” in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Thunø and Wolf, 81–95.
- 55 The site, which was first occupied by the small Olivetan church of S. Pietro in Lamentese, passed to the Republic of Venice in 1762. One of 127 churches closed by order of the Venetian Republic, it was sold to Marco I Balbi-Valier for four hundred Venetian lire on September 27, 1773. *Le tavolette votive della Madonna dei Miracoli di Lonigo*, 5. For the early history and first miracles, see Bertani, *L’historia della gloriosa imagine della Madonna di Lonigo*.
- 56 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1248.

- 57 The panel appears on the cover of and as figure 268 in *Lo straordinario e il quotidiano*, ed. Turchini.
- 58 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1231.
- 59 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1247–51.
- 60 In 1509 Pope Julius II directed Bramante to build a structure to enclose the Holy House. Between 1532 and 1534, the architectural revetment was installed. The decorative sculpture was executed between 1518–22 (the date of Sansovino's reliefs of the *Annunciation*) and the 1540s, the decade in which the figures of the prophets seated in the niches were completed. The Santa Casa project was finished in 1576 with the installation of the bronze doors illustrating the life of Christ.
- 61 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1250.
- 62 Angelitta, *L'istoria della traslatione della Santa Casa della Madonna a Loreto*, 92–102.
- 63 Van der Velden, *The Donor's Image*, 208–22.
- 64 Van der Velden, *The Donor's Image*, 213.
- 65 Maniura, "Ex Votos, Art and Pious Performance," 421.
- 66 Summers, *Real Spaces*, 280.
- 67 Trexler, "Ritual Behavior in Renaissance Florence," 397.
- 68 Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 19v–23r. Miracle no. 7 tells the tale of the servant of the Spanish ambassador wrongly accused of theft, ordered hanged, but rescued by the Madonna. According to Ferrini, "Questo miracolo fu stampato allora in versi, & i putti, e Donne tutte l'imparuano á mente, e ci sono de vecchi, che se nè ricordano benissimo."
- 69 Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory and the Miracoli della Santissima Annunziata," 274–76.
- 70 Fra Arcangelo Domenici's manuscript, which includes the site's two foundational miracles, an array of subsequent wondrous events, and the early history of the structure and its attendant monastery, is dated February 20, 1608. Domenici, *Compendio*, 14v (Miele, 77); and T. Costo, *Lettere . . .*, 1604, as cited in Miele, 7. For another early history of the sanctuary, see Fr. Ludovico Ayrola, *L'Arco celeste, Trionfo di Maria dell'Arco* (Naples: Michele Monaco, 1688).
- 71 Domenici, *Compendio* (Miele, 71–73). What are said to be Aurelia del Prete's feet are on display in the refectory.
- 72 For the Grandone incident, see Domenici, *Compendio*, 49v–50v (Miele, 147–49).
- 73 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, part 3, quest. 62, art. 1, Fathers of the English Dominican Province, trans. and rev. Daniel J. Sullivan, 2 vols. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 2:859.
- 74 For this aspect of pilgrimage, see Robert Maniura, "Image and Relic in the Cult of Our Lady of Prato," in *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Cornelison and Montgomery, 193–212, esp. 201–2.
- 75 Bertani, *L'istoria della gloriosa imagine della Madonna di Lonigo*, 151.
- 76 Sixtus's decree was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent and by a series of successive popes, including Gregory XIII (1572–85) and Paul V (1605–21). See Gianfranco Ciprini and Francesco Ciprini, *La Madonna della Quercia una Meravigliosa storia di fede*, 2:31–32. The Immaculate Conception was not, however, promulgated as doctrine until 1854.
- 77 In 1269 the General Chapter of the Franciscan Order urged the faithful to recite each evening the angelic salutation "Ave Maria." In 1318 Pope John XXII offered indulgences to those who did so. By the late fifteenth century, the Dominicans actively promoted the rosary, which was already widely practiced throughout much of Europe. In addition to the Marian feast day in honor of the Virgin's birth, the Annunciation (March 25), Visitation (May 31), Assumption (August 15), Rosary (October 7), and Presentation (November 21), to name but a few, recognized Mary as the *Mediatrix* and *Salvatrice*.
- 78 While Pius's successor, Gregory XIII (1572–85), would change the name of the feast day to that of the Most Holy Rosary, the praying of the devotional *Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae* became a regular practice.
- 79 Ovid, *Fasti*, 3.265–66, 6 vols., trans. James G. Frazer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1989), 5:139. In fact, ancient texts record the offering of a vast number and wide array of votives ranging from grandiose structures like the temple dedicated to the Lares Permarini in Rome to the unpretentious braided hair rope that was said to have been used to tow Heracles' raft to the shores of the Ionian island of Erythrae. The temple inscription read in part, according to Livy, *History of Rome*, 40.52.4, 14 vols., trans. Evan T. Sage

and Alfred C. Schlesinger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1919), 12:161: "For finishing a great war, for subduing kings [Antiochus the Great], this battle fought for the purpose of winning peace (gave victory) to Lucius Aemilius, the son of Marcus Aemilius as he left the field.... By reason of this victory he vowed a temple to the *lares* of the sea." The vow was made in 190 BCE. I am grateful to Paul Jacobs for this reference. For the reference to the rope, made from hair offered by Thracian women, see Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 16 vols., trans. W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam, 1926), 3:195–96 (Achaia, 7.5.7–8). For a discussion of *oscilla*, see Rabun Taylor, "Roman Oscilla: An Assessment," *RES*, 48 (2005), 83–105, esp. 87–88. Taylor points to Raoul-Rochette (1836) as having "demonstrated that Greco-Roman votive objects ... not only were hung in temples, sanctuaries, and sacred trees, but often took the form of little paintings or inscriptions." One of the many fascinating features of the Sacro Monte at Varese is the fresco painted above the fountain at the entrance to the complex. In addition to the pictured map of the pilgrimage route are tablets tied from swags of greenery. The resemblance to the *pinakes* seen on crater fragments and frescoes from Stabiae, like the ones illustrated in Taylor's article, is unmistakable. Whether the resemblance was intentional must remain conjecture.

80 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.743–46, 2 vols., trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1971), 1:457. The translation here departs significantly from that of Miller: "Round about it hung woolen fillets, votive tablets, and wreaths of flowers, witnesses of granted prayers (*vittae mediam memoresque tabellae sartaque cingebant, voti argumenta potentis*). I am grateful to Walter Stephenson for his assistance in translating this passage.

81 Virgil, *The Georgics*, 2.387–89, trans. James Rhoades (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 62. Cultivated fields and sacred groves were not the only places to see such things nor was the reaping of an abundant harvest the sole purpose for their existence. Other ancient texts and archaeological evidence

indicate their presence in temples and point to their donation both *before* and *after* the receipt of godly favor. For example, at Locri, the site of a celebrated sanctuary complex dedicated to Persephone, thousands of votive panels have been unearthed; many carved in stone, some made of clay impressed into molds, and a few painted in encaustic on wooden panels. Viewed in conjunction with the eleven, or possibly twelve, known epigrams given to Nossis of Locri Epizephyrian, it is clear that while votives at this site were most often prenuptial solicitations requesting fecundity, some were expressions of gratitude dedicated by donors who looked back with satisfaction at a life lived well. See M. Barra Bagnasco, *Locri Epizefiri IV: Lo scavo di Marasa a Sud. Il sacello tardo arcaico e la "casa dei leoni"* (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1992); Nossis Epizephyrian, *Palat. Ant.* 9, 605, <http://www.locriantica.it/default.html>, accessed July 24, 2009; and "Nossis and Women's Cult at Locri," <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/essays/fco4/Skinner.html>, accessed May 5, 2009.

82 Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 3.37.89, trans.

H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1933), 375: "But when Diagoras, he who is called θεός [*theos*], having come to Samothrace, was asked by one of his friends whether he who thought that the gods were careless of human affairs, did not perceive from so many painted tablets how many there were whose vows had enabled them to escape the fury of the storm, and to make their way safe into port [*Tu, qui deos putas humana neglegere nonne animadvertis ex tot tabulis pictis, quam multi votes vim tempestatis effugerint in portumque salvi pervenerint*], "That is so," he replied, "because there are no pictures anywhere of those who have been shipwrecked and have perished in the sea." Diagoras, who is mentioned in Aristophanes' *The Clouds*, was forced to flee Athens for his political views and his position on the Eleusinian mysteries. He died in Corinth. An interesting parallel with Cicero's passage is the fourth- to third-century Attic votive relief from Piraeus depicting a dedicant on the prow of a ship greeting the Dioskouroi, twin sons of Zeus and brothers of Helen of Troy (Athens, National Archaeological Museum, no. 1409).

- 83 Juvenal, *Satires*, book 4, Satura 12.18–28, ed. G. G. Ramsay, text accessed January 29, 2011, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu> (Perseus: text: 2007.01.0093:book+4:poem+12).
- 84 Francesco Sacchetti, *Il libro delle trecentonovelle*, ed. Ettore Li Gotti (Milan: Valentino Bompiani, 1946), novella no. 109, 270.
- 85 Karlstadt, as quoted in Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, 100. Within months, Karlstadt's pamphlet *On the Removal of Images* appeared. It was the first iconoclastic tract of the time.
- 86 Luther, as quoted in Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, 40.
- 87 Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, 100–23. See the discussion in [Chapter III](#).
- 88 Erasmus, "A Pilgrimage for Religion's Sake," in *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, trans. Craig R. Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 285–312. For Mary's letter, see 289–91.
- 89 Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 26 (Giacomo Zucchini), 27 (Francesco Meriso's son), and 76 (Ferra mosca di Mandurina).
- 90 Erasmus to Rotterdam, *Praise of Folly and Letter to Martin Drop, 1515* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 126–30.
- 91 Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, 47–50.
- 92 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, esp. 458–90; Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 345–56. Also see Cole and Zorach's introduction to their edited volume, *The Idol in the Age of Art*.
- 93 Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 31–72, here 37.
- 94 Working from the premise that "commissioned art always conveys information about the patron," Jonathan Nelson and Richard Zeckhauser's application of modern economic theories to Renaissance patronage practices is innovative and compelling. Nelson and Zeckhauser, *The Patron's Payoff*, esp. 1–66. Here it is enough to cite their reference (18–19) to Filarete's *Trattato della architettura* in which the patron is credited with "generating" the concept and the architect with "gestating" the seed. Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 23–29.
- 95 Stevens-Arroyo, "The Evolution of Marian Devotionalism within Christianity and the Ibero-Mediterranean Polity," 14, offers the following definition of this form of belief and practices as expressed "apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of official religion."
- 96 Merlin Cocai, *Baldus*, in *Le maccheronee*, 2 vols., ed. Alessandro Luzio (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1928), 2:300–1 (Italian translation). The terms cited here come from the macaronic text, *Macaronea*, 7.132. I am indebted to Ann Mullaney who generously communicated with me about Folengo and this passage.
- 97 See, for example, Camille, *The Gothic Idol*; André Chastel, "Les 'idoles' à la Renaissance," in *Roma centro ideale della cultura dell'antico nei secoli XV e XVI*, ed. Silva Danesi Squarzina (Milan: Electa, 1989), 468–76; Giuseppe Scavizzi, *Arte e architettura sacra: cronache e documenti sulla controversia tra riformati e cattolici (1550–1550)* (Reggio Calabria: Casa Editrice del Libro, 1982); Giuseppe Scavizzi, *The Controversy on Images from Calvin to Baronius* (New York: Lang, 1992); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), esp. 377–564; Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands: Iconoclasm in Reformation Zurich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Hans Belting, "Idolatrie heute," in *Der Zweite Blick: Bildgeschichte und Bildreflexion*, ed. Belting and Kamper, 273–80; Lucia Saccardo and Danilo Zardin, eds., *Arte, religione, e comunità in Italia rinascimentale e barocca: atti di convegno di studi sul Santuario de; Beato Vergine dei miracoli di Saronno* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 200); Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*; and Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, esp. 161–203.
- 98 For the edicts from Orleans and Auxerre, see Kriss-Rettenbeck, *Ex Voto*, 107–8.
- 99 A ninth-century source references a painted panel left before the venerated Christ of Paneas (Baniyas, Syria). Michele Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista: storia delle immagini sacre attribuite a San Luca* (Pisa: GISEM, 1998), 40–42. For the Early Christian response to this statue, which Eusebius observed "was said to resemble the features of Jesus" but may have been a figure of Asclepius, emptied of paganism and refilled with Christian meaning, see Steven Bigham, *Early Christian Attitudes toward Images* (Rollinsford: Orthodox Research Institute Press, 2004), 186–89, 210.
- 100 Bacci, "Pro remedio animae," 220–21; Liciso Maganato, *Da Altichiero a Pisanello* (Venice: Neri Pozza, 1958), 62–63, n. 66, plate LVI. The

image on Suor Sara's ex-voto is supplemented by both inscription and chronicled accounts of the incident. The central inscription as translated in Evelyn Welch, *Art in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 161–62, reads as follows:

On 14 October 1432 there were two knights who were about to fight to the death. And the venerable lady, Madonna Sara prayed to God and to St. Francis asking that they should make peace or at least they should not kill each other. She had this deed painted as appears in the present painting. And thus by the grace of God and through good prayers, it happened that the two knights did make peace without any harm to their persons. The inscribed banderoles together with the coats of arms tied with red ribbons to trees to the left and right of the knights identify the protagonists. Chronicles add other details concerning the conflict: the argument was about a servant, the impending duel was to be judged by the *signore* of Ferrara, Marquis Niccolò III. In fact, the conflict was resolved through arbitration. For the chronicled account, see Alessandra Mottola Molfino and Mauro Natale, eds., *Le muse e il principe: Arte di corte nel Rinascimento Padano* (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1991), 1:292–93, cat. no. 74.

101 Bacci, "Pro remedio animae," 220–21.

102 For an in-depth discussion of the altarpiece, see Leanne Gilbertson, "Imaging St. Margaret: *Imitatio Christi* and *Imitatio Mariae* in the Vanni Altarpiece," in *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Cornelison and Montgomery, 115–38, esp. 135–38, which discusses the final scene in the *vita* retable. The models of maritime vessels pictured in Sant'Antonio di Castello, Venice, make sense in light of the geographic and commercial identities of the Venetian Republic. Similar objects are preserved at the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco (Naples). For a discussion of Carpaccio's altarpiece and its original context, see Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 186–89. For a discussion, of votives at maritime sites, see Michele Bacci, "Portolano sacro. Santuari e immagini sacre lungo le rotte di navigazione del Mediterraneo tra tardo

Medioevo e prima età moderna," in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Thunø and Wolf, 223–48.

103 Leandro Novelli, *La preziosa collezione di Ex voto della Badia di Santa Maria del Monte di Cesena* (Forlì: C.C.I.A., 1959), 3–5. Surprisingly, the observation is not re-presented in Novelli and Massaccesi, *Ex voto del Santuario della Madonna del Monte di Cesena*. However, Faranda, "Fides tua se saluum fecit," 42–43 and 147, cat. no. 1, reasserts the connection.

104 Peter Meller, "Drawings by Francesco Cossa in the Uffizi," *Master Drawings*, 3 (1965), 12.

105 "I miracoli della Madonna delle Carceri in due codici della Biblioteca Roncioniana di Prato," ed. Isabella Gagliardi, in *Santa Maria delle Carceri a Prato*, ed. Benvenuti, 115, miracle no. 106.

106 Masa, ed., *Il "Libro dei miracoli" della Madonna di Tirano*, 127, miracle no. 70. For references to the aforementioned objects, see 64, miracle no. 8 (an ox); 124, miracle no. 67, "un tavorela depincta, et cum imagine d'argento del putino"; 118, miracle no. 61, "una tavoleta d'argento [raffigurante la Madonna]"; 99, no. 42, "tre ducati d'oro"; 122, miracle no. 65, "cum oblatione de 25 Floreni d'oro"; and 107, no. 50, " . . . cum proponimento de fargli depingere la figura della glorios Vergine Maria." The foundation stone of the church was laid on March 25, 1505. The church was consecrated in 1528. Today, several dozen *tavolette* offered since the late seventeenth century are on view.

107 C. Pasero, "Arredi e paramenti sacri in S. Maria dei Miracoli nel secolo XVI," *Memorie storiche della diocesi di Brescia*, 1 (1965), as cited in *Lo straordinario e quotidiano*, ed. Turchini, 13, n. 4. The Madonna delle Grazie in the Chapel of San Bonifazio in Siena's Cathedral, which was popularly known as the Madonna of the Large Eyes (Madonna degli occhi grossi) also attracted votives in the form of eyes. Inventories note thirty-four pairs in 1449; forty-two in 1458; and fifty-six pairs in 1467. See Monika Butzek, "Di nuovo sulla Madonna del Voto: La trasformazione in icona di una tavola da altare," in *Presenza del Passato: Political Ideas e modelli culturali nella storia e nell'arte senese* (Siena: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2008), 149.

108 See Nelli, *Origine della Madonna della Quercia*, 6–7.

109 Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 106–10.

- 110 Bernardino of Busti (ca. 1450–1500), *Mariale*, Sermon 1, “On the Nativity of Mary,” part 3, as cited in Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*, 109–10. Compendia of miracle legends associated with the Virgin, *Mariales* were among the earliest illustrated books printed in fifteenth-century Italy. See Mary Vincentine Gripsky, “Mary Legends in Italian Manuscripts in the Major Libraries of Italy,” *Medieval Studies*, 14 (1952), 9–47, and 15 (1953), 14–46; and Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 132–65.
- 111 For an example of the Virgin as *Avvocata*, see the quote from Ferrini at the beginning of this chapter. Lionel Rothkrug, “Popular Religion and Holy Shrines: Their Influence on the Origins of the German Reformation and Their Role in German Cultural Development,” in *Religion and the People, 800–1700*, ed. Obelkevich, 33–37.
- 112 Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 3–4. The designation of Purgatory as “the third place” is that of Martin Luther. Augustine is among those most responsible for the infernalization of purgatory. For the Scholastic systemization of the doctrine, see Le Goff, 237–88. Also see Fenn, *The Persistence of Purgatory*; and Catherine of Genoa, *Purgation and Purgatory: The Spiritual Dialogue*, trans. Serge Hughes (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).
- 113 *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. Schroeder, 214.
- 114 In large urban centers such as Milan and Florence, Bernardino of Siena attracted “tens of thousands.” See Cynthia L. Polecristi, “In the Shop of the Lord: Bernardino of Siena and Popular Devotion,” in *Beyond Florence: The Contours of Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, ed. Paula Findlen, Michelle M. Fontaine, and Duane J. Osheim (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 153. In a late sermon on the Coronation of the Virgin in the *Mariale*, Bernardino da Busti affirmed Mary’s jurisdiction over grace. See, in addition to sources noted in note 108, Hilda C. Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 2 vols. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 1:321; Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, esp. 81–163; Virginia Reinburg, “Hearing Lay People’s Prayers,” in *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800): Essays in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davis*, ed. Barbara B. Diefendorf and Carla Hesse (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 19–39. For a more populist-based discussion of Mary, see Klaus Schreiner, *Maria: Jungfrau, Mutter, Herrscherin* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1994).
- 115 Peter Damian of Ravenna, *De diversis appaitionibus et miraculis*, tract 34, part 2, as cited in Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 178.
- 116 Peter Damian of Ravenna, *De diversis appaitionibus et miraculis*, tract 34, part 2, as cited in Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 178–79.
- 117 For Mary’s omnipresence, see Trexler, “Florentine Religious Experience,” 24.
- 118 Rubin, *Images and Identity*, 24. For an insightful discussion of the justification of ostentatious display, see Michael Cole on the late sixteenth-century decoration of the Salvati Chapel, San Marco, Florence. Cole, *Ambitious Form*, 203–17.
- 119 Rucellai, as cited in Nelson and Zeckhauser, *The Patron’s Payoff*, 44. Also see Richard A. Goldthwaite, “The Painting Industry in Early Modern Italy,” in *Painting for Profit: The Economic Lives of Seventeenth-Century Italian Painters*, ed. Richard E. Spear and Philip Sohm (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 275–301.
- 120 Rubin, *Images and Identity*, 130.
- 121 For an insightful discussion of the economics of information, see Molly Bourne, “Mantegna’s *Madonna della Vittoria* and the Rewriting of Gonzaga History,” in Nelson and Zeckhauser, *The Patron’s Payoff*, 166–84. Also see Bourne, *Francesco II Gonzaga*, 65–99.
- 122 Bronzini views the self-referential “Io” as attesting a “phenomenon of rapport” between the supplicant and her or his chosen intercessor. Bronzini, “Ex voto e cultura religiosa popolare,” esp. 11–12.
- 123 Trexler, “Ritual Behavior in Renaissance Florence,” 397.
- 124 Megan Holmes discusses this in chapter 6, “Image and Efficacy,” in *Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence*.
- 125 Federico Zeri made the comment in a television interview, broadcast in April 1993, portions of which were printed in F. C. Crispolti, Ezio Ranaldi, and Leonardo Valente, *Le tavolette votive della Collezione San Lorenzo* (Assisi: Minerva, 1994), 12. Recent years have seen a sharpened focus on popular culture and, increasingly, an interest in the nexus between high and low during this time period, including essays and studies by Natalie

- Zemon Davis, Tessa Watt, Pamela M. Jones, Roger Chartier, Carlo Ginzburg, Peter Burke, and Bob Scribner. Here, I will allow Michele de Montaigne to speak to the issue: “On the Wednesday after Easter, when Monsieur Maldonado, who was then in Rome, asked me what opinion I had of the mores of this city, and especially in the matter of religion, he found his judgment entirely in conformity with mine: that the common people were incomparably more devout in France than here; but the rich, and especially the courtiers, a little less.”
- 126 See [Chapter IV](#), “Narrative Modes.”
- 127 There was a notable correlation between fair and pilgrimage sites. See Welch, *Shopping in the Renaissance*, 168.
- 128 Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, eds., *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, 190.
- 129 See Hurbert Jedin, “Entstehung und Tragweite des Trienter Dekrets über die Bilderverehrung,” in *Kirche des Glaubens, Kirche der Geschichte: Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Freiburg: Herder, 1966), 4:460–98. Also see Robert Bireley, S.J., “Redefining Catholicism: Trent and Beyond,” in Hsia, *Reform and Expansion, 1500–1660*, 145–61; and, in the same volume, Simon Ditchfield, “Tridentine Worship and the Cult of Saints,” 201–24.
- 130 I am indebted to John W. O’Malley, who generously reviewed the matter of Tridentine policy with me and provided me with a copy of his essay “Trent, Sacred Images, and Catholics’ Senses of the Sensuous,” which will appear in a volume edited by Marcia Hall and Tracey Cooper. For documents concerning French proposals, see *Concilium Tridentinum: Diariorum, actorum, epistolarum, tractatum nova collectio*, ed. Societas Goerresiana (Freiburg: Herder, 1910–2001), 13:114–40.
- 131 *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 2:774–76. For the full Latin text, see <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.v.i.i.xii.html>, accessed October 20, 2012.
- 132 For the distinction between Tridentine decrees and *Tridentinismo*, see Giuseppe Alberigo, “The Council of Trent,” in *Catholicism in Early Modern History: A Guide to Research*, ed. John W. O’Malley (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1988), 211–26. For the proceedings of regional councils, including those held during the eighteen-year span in which Trent was officially in session, see volume 10 of *Acta Conciliorum et epistolae decretales, ac constitutiones Summorum Pontificum*. For an example of regional interests, see the decree “De Reliquiis & veneratione Sanctorum” of the Conciliorum Mexicanum, 10: col. 1700.
- 133 Noyes, “*A Me Toccato Masticare Pillole Amare*,” 8; Marina Caffiero, “Sanità, politica e sistemi di potere,” in Gajano S. Boesch, *Sanità, culti, agiografia: temi e prospettive: atti del 1. Convegno di studio dell’associazione italiana per lo studio della santità, dei culti e dell’agiografia*: Roma, 24–26 ottobre 1996 (Rome: Viella, 1997), 363–71. It has been argued that the localization of cults, particularly in later centuries, “encouraged fragmentation of the Catholic church’s central doctrinal figures into a myriad of local variants.” Lepovitz, “The Religious Context of Crisis Resolution in the Votive Paintings of Catholic Europe,” 758.
- 134 Noyes, “*A Me Toccato Masticare Pillole Amare*,” 80–83, supplies a list that in addition to works by ecclesiastics like Paleotti and Borromeo, includes Gian Paolo Lomazzo’s *Trattato dell’arte*, 1585; Giovan Battista Armenini, *De’ veri precetti*, 1587; Gregorio Comanini, *Il Figino*, 1591; and Federico Zuccaro’s *L’idea de’ pittori, scultori ed architetti*, 1607. Also see, Christian Hecht, *Katolische Bildertheologie in Zeitalter von Gegenreformation und Barock: Studien zu Traktaten von Johannes Molanus, Gabriele Paleotti und Anderen Autoren* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1997), and Giuseppe Scavizzi, *The Controversy on Images from Calvin to Baronio* (New York: P. Lang, 1982).
- 135 While Borromeo had not been present at Trent, he had, as secretary of state to the pontiff, been kept fully informed on all matters under review, including the French proposal concerning images. See *Concilium Tridentinum: Diariorum, actorum, epistolarum, tractatum nova collectio*, 13:125.
- 136 Johannes Molanus, *Traité des saintes images*, trans. François Boespflug, Olivier Christin, and Benoît Tassel (Paris: Cerf, 1996), 2:112–14.
- 137 Charles Borromeo, *Instructiones fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae libri II* [1577], in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 3:44–45.
- 138 The document is reprinted in the vernacular facing the Latin in Flaminio Corner, *Ecclesiae Torcellanae Antiquis Monumentis nunc etiam primum editis illustrate*, pars secunda (tom.

X.P.II) (Venice: Baptiste Pasquali, 1749), 165–70. San Bernardino was closed in the eighteenth century.

- 139 G. Ferretti, *Libro de vita contemplative, lectinoe, mediatione, oratione, contemplatione, scala dil paradiso intitulado cum adaptatione mistica del historie divine et espositione de suoi misterii et excellentissimi sacramenti* (Brescia, 1527), 50v.

CHAPTER III. DETERMINING FUNCTIONAL VALUE: ATTESTATIONS OF FACT AND FAITH

- 1 Nicholas had been ordained in 1271 at age twenty-five. He moved to Tolentino three years later in 1274. In addition to Tolentino, hearings were held in Camerino, San Severino, and other towns in the surrounding area.
- 2 As the case of Armano Pungilupo (Punzilovo) indicates, there was good reason for questioning public perception of saintly efficacy. Following his death in 1269, miraculous healings were reported to have occurred at Pungilupo's tomb. This prompted the clergy of Ferrara's cathedral to petition for canonization. However, a Dominican inquisitor revealed Pungilupo to have been a member of the Cathar heresy. Ultimately, both sides submitted their evidence to Pope Boniface VIII, who sided with the inquisitor. In 1301 Pungilupo's body was exhumed and burned, his ashes dispersed in the Po. See Gabriele Zanella, *Itinerari ereticali Patari e Catari tra Rimini e Verona* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per Medio Evo, 1986). Also see Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 117.
- 3 See, for example, Occhioni, ed., *Il processo*, 455, CCXII testis; and Cicconi, ed., *Il Compendio del processo*, 94 (miracle no. 149).
- 4 Cicconi, ed., *Il Compendio del processo*, 106 (miracle no. 195).
- 5 Between the canonization hearings and the official declaration of sanctity, Pope Boniface IX had issued on March 1, 1400, a plenary indulgence to all who visited Nicholas's burial site on the Sunday after the holy man's feast day, September 10.
- 6 Cicconi, ed., *Il Compendio del processo*, 100 (miracle no. 175); 78 (miracle no. 93); 103 (miracle no. 186).
- 7 Biondo and White, *Italy Illuminated*, region 5, chap. 17, 263–64.
- 8 Alamanni, "Narratione de' successi intorno alla miracolosa imagine della gloriosissima Vergine scopertasi in Mondovi a Vico l'anno

1595," in Mellano, *Popolo, religiosità e costume in Piemonte*, 193.

- 9 Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 13v.
- 10 Morigia, *Historia & origine famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 61 (Caterina) and 54 (Tadini). Tadini is described as *predicatore e lettore di theologie*. Caterina's desperation and loss of faith in human abilities is a topos in votive literature throughout Italy. See, for example, Domenici, *Compendio*, 57v, miracle no. 65 (Miele, 164), having given up all hope, Ottavio Cacavo's high fever suddenly broke when he turned away from his physicians and instead prayed for relief to the Madonna dell'Arco, whose sanctuary is on the outskirts of Naples; and Masa, ed., *Il "Libro dei miracoli" della Madonna di Tirano*, 83, miracle no. 27, in despair, Gaspere, the son of Gabriele del Dugo of Brescia, stepped back from death's door by the grace of the Madonna di Tirano, whose shrine is less than two kilometers from the current Swiss border.
- 11 Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 70 (Francesco Sforza); 68 (Ludovico il Moro).
- 12 Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 82–83.
- 13 For definitions of *donare*, see Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario della lingua Italiana* (Turin: Unione Tipografica, 1990), 4:941–42; and Domino Du Change, *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis* (Graz: Akademische Druck-Verlagsanstalt, 1954), 2:178–79.
- 14 In this sense, gifting can be understood to be performance as defined by Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 112. In embarking on this path, I have taken the exemplary study by Jussen to heart. Bernhard Jussen, "Religious Discourses of the Gift in the Middle Ages: Semantic Evidences (Second to Twelfth Centuries)," in *Negotiating the Gift*, ed. Algazi, Groebner, and Jussen, 173–92.
- 15 Mauss's essay appeared first in *L'Année sociologique*, n.s., 1 (1923–24), 30–186. For the text in English, see Mauss, *The Gift*. The list, which includes discussions that informed Mauss's study, is long. Among the more influential voices with relevance to the subject under discussion here, are Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Simmel,

- The Philosophy of Money*; James G. Carrier, *Gift and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700* (London: Routledge, 1994); Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Appadurai, 3–63; Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, esp. 1–83; Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*; and Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 169–87.
- 16 Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, 3–10.
 - 17 See Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 97–98 and 63: Value "is never a quality of the objects, but a judgment upon them which remains inherent in the subject."
 - 18 Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 95. It is worth considering Matthew 10:5–10, which recounts Jesus' injunction to the apostles, in this context. "These twelve Jesus sent forth, having instructed them thus: ... Cure the sick, raise up the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not keep gold, or silver, or money ... nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staff." Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, 100, posits that "in a profound sense, the religious reformations of the sixteenth century were a quarrel about gifts" and the possibility that reciprocity can exist between humans and God. As she discusses in the chapter "Gifts and the Gods," 100–23, the Catholic gift system was "a complex and articulated reciprocity" between laity and clergy, rich and poor, the living and the dead. The sacrifice of Mass was "the central symbolic" gift-giving event from God to humans, yet "there were [also] gifts to God, from whom all gifts came. Alms to the poor were often described as simultaneously offered to God as well." To this should be added the following from John Bossy. As a social institution, Mass "procured ... salvation in two ways. As the sacrifice of the new law, it was a reparatory or satisfactory ritual in which was renewed or recapitulated the self-immolation of Christ atoning ... to his Father for man's offence ... [enabling] the restoration of ... social relations between God and man.... As a sacrament the mass completes what the pacifying sacrifice makes possible: the Eucharistic eating whereby the Christian participates in communion, common union." John Bossy, "The Mass as a Social Institution," *Past and Present*, 100 (1983), 29–61.
 - 19 Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 170–79. Also see Alexander Nagel, "Art as Gift: Liberal Art and Religious Reform in the Renaissance," in *Negotiating the Gift*, ed. Algazi, Groebner, and Jussen, 319–60.
 - 20 Benedetto Fontanini (with revisions by Marcantonio Flamini), *Il Beneficio di Christo, con le versioni del secolo XVI, documenti e testimonianze*, ed. Salvatore Caponetto (Florence: Sansoni, 1972).
 - 21 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 380–81 (5.4. 1131b 25–5.5. 1134a). Also see, Lynn Meskell, *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt: Material Biographies Past and Present* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 25.
 - 22 Seneca, *De Beneficiis*, 1.1.1–2.5, in *Moral Essays*, 3 vols., trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 3:3–13.
 - 23 Bernhard Jussen, "Religious Discourses of the Gift in the Middle Ages: Semantic Evidences (Second to Twelfth Centuries)," in *Negotiating the Gift*, ed. Algazi, Groebner, and Jussen, 183.
 - 24 *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. Cornelius Petrus Mayer, Erich Feldmann, et al. (Basel: Schwabe, 1986–), "Confessio," 1: col. 1122.
 - 25 Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 592 (XXII. 8). The chapter heading reads: "Of miracles which were wrought that the world might believe in Christ, and which have not ceased since the world believed."
 - 26 Augustine, *Epistles* 103.13, as cited in Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, 106. The reference to the Madonna dell'Impruneta, which is in the prologue to the statutes of the Compagnia della Madonna dell'Impruneta, is cited by Megan Holmes in chapter five of *Miraculous Images of Renaissance Florence*.
 - 27 For an example of sanity regained, see Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 107v; for Aurelia del Prete's new pair of feet, see Domenici, *Compendio*, 12v–14r (Miele, 72–74). Since the twelfth century, miracles of this sort had been the "programmatic basis of liturgy, frescoes, and other devotional art" employed to counter voices of doubt, warn against heretical theology, and unify

- communities. See Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 47–68. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century miracle-book accounts of sacred images responding to physical abuse by bleeding, bruising, or crying and the immediacy of popular justice meted out to the abuser – the on-the-spot hanging of the Madonna dell’Arco’s attacker from a nearby lime tree can stand as an example – follow more forcefully in the same vein. Also see Michael P. Carroll, *Veiled Threats: The Logic of Popular Catholicism in Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
- 28 Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 179; and Massimo Firpo, “Gli ‘spirituali,’ l’accademia di Modena e di Formulario di Fede del 1542: Controllo del dissenso religioso e nicodemismo,” *Revista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 20 (1984), 40–111.
 - 29 Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, 105; and Bernhard Jussen, “Religious Discourses of the Gift in the Middle Ages,” in *Negotiating the Gift*, ed. Algazi, Groebner, and Jussen, 173–92.
 - 30 Thomas à Kempis, *Dialogi nouiciorum*, as cited in Jussen, “Religious Discourses of the Gift in the Middle Ages,” in *Negotiating the Gift*, ed. Algazi, Groebner, and Jussen, 178. In addition to Jussen’s critically important discussion, meanings of the term *munus* are reviewed in Netta Zagagi, “A Note on *munus*, *munus fungi* in Early Latin,” *Glotta*, 60 (1982), 280–81; also see Charleton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=munus>, accessed April 22, 2012.
 - 31 St. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Dods, 313 (X. 24) and 502 (XVIII. 49).
 - 32 I Corinthians 1:26–29 and Philippians 2:3–8.
 - 33 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 15 (III.v.9).
 - 34 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Pusey, 37 (VI.v.8).
 - 35 For the often cited excerpt from Domenici, *Rule for the Management of Family Care*, 1403, see Creighton E. Gilbert, *Italian Art, 1400–1500: Sources and Documents* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 145–46; Desiderius Erasmus, *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (London: Methuen, 1905), 5th rule, chap. 13, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/191/5534>, accessed February 22, 2012.
 - 36 Erich Auerbach, “Sermo humilis,” *Romanische Forschungen*, 63 (1952), 304–64. Also see Ramsay MacMullen, “A Note on Sermo Humilis,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, 17 (1966), 108–12; and Hamburger, “To Make Women Weep.”
 - 37 Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, 170.
 - 38 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. J. F. Shaw (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 682 (IV. 10) and 687 (IV. 18).
 - 39 Hamburger identifies this work as giving rise to “an aesthetics based on the Christian soteriology ... [that] the fallen can, through grace, rise again.” Hamburger, “To Make Women Weep,” 19.
 - 40 In recent years, the motivational circumstances behind Tommaso Portinari’s commissioning of the triptych have received new attention. See, in particular, Margaret L. Koster, “New Documentation for the Portinari Altar-Piece,” *Burlington*, 145 (2003), 164–79; and Susanne Franke, “Between Status and Spiritual Salvation: The *Portinari Triptych* and Tommaso Portinari’s Concern for His *Memoria*,” *Simiolus*, 33 (2007–8), 123–44. The altarpiece clearly had special significance for its audience. The significance can best be explained perhaps by turning to Jacobus de Voragine’s highly popular *Golden Legend*. “The manifestation of Christ’s birth was useful to us in several ways: 1) to confound demons, 2) obtaining pardon for sin, 3) curing our infirmities, 4) humbling our pride. So Augustine says that the humility of the Son of God, which he demonstrated in his incarnation, was for us ‘an example, a sacrament and a medicine.’” See Jacobus da Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:37–43.
 - 41 For a history of the building project and the politics surrounding it, see Paul Davies, “The Early History of S. Maria delle Carceri in Prato,” *Society of Architectural Historians*, 54 (1995), 326–35; Claudio Cerretelli, “Da oscura prigione a tempio di luce,” in *Santa Maria delle Carceri*, ed. Benvenuti, 45–95. Excerpts from the shrine’s miracle book, *Miracoli et gratie della gloriosa madre vergine Maria delle Charcere di Prato*, Biblioteca Roncioniana, ms. 86 (Q.II.6), are in Bandini, “Il quinto centenario della ‘mirabilissima apparitione’”; and more recently and comprehensibly transcribed

- by Isabella Gagliardi in “I miracoli della Madonna delle Carceri in due codici della Biblioteca Roncioniana di Prato,” in *Santa Maria delle Carceri*, ed. Benvenuti, 104–34. Gagliardi’s transcription (135–51) includes, in addition to ms. 86, Biblioteca Roncioniana, ms. 87 (Q.II.5) compiled by Giuliano di Francesco Guizzelmi da Prato (1446–1518). In her prefacing remarks, she proposes 1487 as the *post quem*. For insightful and expansive discussions of the site and the shrine’s miracle book, see Maniura, “Image and Relic in the Cult of Our Lady of Prato,” in *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Cornelison and Montgomery, 193–212; Maniura, “Voting with Their Feet: Art, Pilgrimage and Ratings in the Renaissance,” in *Revaluing Renaissance Art*, ed. Neher and Shepherd, 187–97; Maniura, “The Images and Miracles of Santa Maria delle Carceri,” in *The Miraculous Image*, ed. Thunø and Wolf, 81–95; Maniura, “Persuading the Absent Saint: Image and Performance in Marian Devotion,” *Critical Inquiry*, 35 (2009), 629–54; and Maniura, “Ex Votos, Art and Pious Performance.”
- 42 The term *mutatione* is used to describe the July 6 transfigurations as well as subsequent and less astounding transformations. See Bandini, “Il quinto centenario della ‘mirabilissima apparitione,’” 60–61; and Gagliardi, “I miracoli della Madonna delle Carceri,” in *Santa Maria delle Carceri*, ed. Benvenuti, 121.
- 43 Gagliardi, “I miracoli della Madonna delle Carceri,” in *Santa Maria delle Carceri*, ed. Benvenuti, 128 (Q.II.6, 51r), blouse and laver bowl; 127 (Q.II.6, 50r), chalice; 126 (Q.II.6, 49r), yellow wax candle.
- 44 The most notable exception is the miracle book. See Gagliardi, “I miracoli della Madonna delle Carceri,” in *Santa Maria delle Carceri*, ed. Benvenuti, 117. “E adì 20 di novembre in decto anno [1485] Andrea del Germanio, che vende le chandelle, gli donò uno libro de’ miracoli che sono in forma, chon licenza del camarlingho, et venne a satisfare decto boto et questo miracolo si levò d’un sudecto quadernuccio.”
- 45 For the context of the letter to the Signoria written by Carlo de’ Medici, see Davies, “The Early History of S. Maria delle Carceri in Prato,” 326–27.
- 46 Nelli, *Origine della Madonna della Quercia*, 15r.
- 47 For an anonymous account of Nicholas’s life, see *Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur*, 70 vols. (Paris: V. Palmel, 1863–1940), Septembris III, 664–65.
- 48 Cicconi, ed., *Il Compendio del processo*, 56–63 (miracles 27–42), lists miraculous resuscitations. These include stillborns and various males ranging in age from three years old to adult. The fresco in the Grand Chapel appears to represent a little girl.
- 49 Gregory of Tour, *Liber vitae partum* 15. 3. 272, as cited in Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, 106–7. Also see William D. McCready, *Signs of Sanctity in the Thought of Gregory of Tours* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1989); R. A. Markus, “How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 2 (1994), 257–71; and Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
- 50 Innocent III, bull canonizing Homobonus of Cremona, January 12, 1199, as cited in Kleinberg, “Proving Sanctity,” 189. Kleinberg adds, “This statement became one of the accepted formulas,” appearing repeatedly in bulls of canonization.
- 51 It is worth considering the deathbed scene in the fresco cycle honoring Pope Urban V (pontificate 1362–70) in the cloister of Bolzano’s cathedral. Standing at the foot of the bed of the deceased pontiff, a notary is already busy recording testimonies offered by *miracolari*. In fact, some 380 depositions were taken in 1378. Urban was never canonized, but he was beatified by Pope Pius IX in 1870.
- 52 The definition of ex-voto is from Grove Art Online, <http://www.oxfordartonline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/To27190>. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 75. Also see, Lepovitz, “The Religious Context of Crisis Resolution in the Votive Paintings of Catholic Europe,” 758–59. Although votive objects and images as well as miracle books indicate intercessors resolved a wide array of crises, they also point to specializations and thus advocate a specific saint for help in dealing with a particular need. The inventory of votive objects left at the Brescian Sanctuary of Santa Maria

- dei Miracoli in 1554, for example, lists a preponderant number (586) of donated *occhi d'argento* (eyes cast in silver). By contrast, only two of the seventy-four miracles (numbers 44 and 68) attributed to the Madonna of Tirano between 1504 and 1519 involved accidental eye injury. The Madonna of Tirano, whose sanctuary is but two kilometers from the current Swiss-Italian border, was instead known for the miracle of infant resuscitation. More than 31 percent of the miracles recorded in the sanctuary's *libro dei miracoli* speak of stillborns and infants who died within a few days of their births brought briefly back to life. The miracle enabled the baptism of innocents.
- 53 See Occhioni, ed., *Il processo*, 455, miracle no. 212: "... in loco Sancti Augustini, est quaedam [i]cona in qua est depicta ymago dicti fratris Nicolai; coram qua [i]cona et ymagine ponuntur continue, et offeruntur multe ymagine cere ab hominibus et mulieribus dicti terre." It has been suggested that Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino (1418–1506) is responsible for the polychrome statue that now sits atop the sepulcher. It has been dated circa 1460–65.
- 54 Cicconi, ed., *Il Compendio del processo*, 62–63 (miracle no. 33), 98 (miracle no. 169), and 94 (miracle no. 149) for counterweights and measures; 86 (miracle no. 121) for a painted wax figure of Nicholas; 72 (miracle no. 70) for the tablet.
- 55 Gatta, López, and Papetti, *Per Grazia Ricevuta: Gli ex-voto del Museo di San Nicola a Tolentino*, 373–75, cat. nos. 1–16.
- 56 Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 69; Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy*, 124.
- 57 The list is long but among the many notable scholarly contributions to the subject, are Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*; Hans Oppel, "Exemplum und Mirakel: Versuch einer Begriffsbestimmung," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 58 (1976), 96–114; Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984); Philip M. Soergel, *Wondrous in His Saints: Counter-Reformation Propaganda in Bavaria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Others are cited in notes throughout this chapter and in [Chapter V](#).
- 58 Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 8, makes this point, noting that although nuanced by factors such as the "impact of classical philosophy ... [and] the polemical needs of the church in the face of its ideological foes," the definition "underwent relatively few changes in the medieval centuries." His observation is substantiated by the pre- and post-Vatican II discussions of miracles in *Enciclopedia Cattolica* (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1952), 1068–78; and *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 9:886–94.
- 59 St. Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, 34, and *Contra faustum*, 26.3, were accessed through the on-line Catholic Encyclopedia, which relies upon the translation of C. L. Cornish in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (1887); Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 3 vols., trans. Hugh Tredennick (London: William Heineman, 1936), 3:7 (1.1.981b.12) for the reference to fire. Also see Harden, "The Concept of Miracle from St. Augustine to Modern Apologetics."
- 60 St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Dods, 598 (XXII. 9).
- 61 "Virtutesque non quaslibet Deus faciebat per manus Pauli, Ita ut etiam super languidos deferrentur a corpore ejus sudaria vel semicintia, et recedebant ab eis languores et spiritus nequam egrediebantur." *The Hexaglot Bible Comprising the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in the Original Tongues*, 6 vols., ed. Rev. Edward Riches de Levante (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901), 2:146–47.
- 62 Predictably, word of the miraculous restoration of sight by Gervasius and Protasius traveled and "henceforth did the fame spread," attracting untold numbers of pilgrims to the tombs of the two martyrs, which had only recently been transferred to Milan's new Ambrosian basilica. Augustine reports the miracle twice. The first quoted passage is from *The City of God*, XXII. 8, the second comes from the more detailed account in *Confessions*, IX.vii.16. Earlier in his career, Augustine had noted (*De vera religione*, XXV. 47) that miracles no longer occurred, a statement he refutes in *The City of God*. The transference of efficacy from a holy person to a material object reported in Acts 19:11–12, finds an interesting parallel in the off-site use of objects that had touched a miraculous image. For examples, see Robert Maniura, "The Images and Miracles of Santa Maria delle Carceri," in *The Miraculous Image*, ed. Thunø and Wolf, 81–95.

- 63 St. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God* (*Quaestiones disputate de potentia Dei*), 3 vols., trans. English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1932–34), quest. 6, arti. 9, <http://dhspirory.org/thomas/QDdePotentia>, accessed April 11, 2013.
- 64 Gedefridus, *Summa super titulis decretalium: novissime cum repertorio et numeris principalium et emergentium impressa*, 1519 (repr., Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1968), ad X. 3.45, fol. 166 (repr. 333).
- 65 For the Scultori engraving, see Paolo Bellini, ed., *L'opera incisa di Adamo e Diana Scultori* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1991), 161, cat. no. St. 6. *The Life and Miracles of St. Albert, Carmelite*, is in Rome: Biblioteca Casanatense # 20 B I 44/58.
- 66 St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses* 2. 31, in *ANF01. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* [1867], trans. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2001), 673.
- 67 Jerome, as cited in Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, 106. Contemporaneously, Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376–444), like Ambrose before him, had dreams and experienced visions that led him to the remains of “forgotten” healing martyrs, prompting the erection of shrines in which to properly house the discovered relics.
- 68 Valuing the remains of saints as *pignora*, or tokens of surety enabling the dead to continue to have an agentic presence among the living, lost none of its currency during the following centuries. Indeed, from the eighth through the twelfth centuries, relics “formed the primary focus of religious devotion throughout Europe,” a circumstance causing them to be “bought and sold, stolen and divided,” sometimes with the “official or quasi-official involvement of central authorities.” Patrick Geary, “Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics,” in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Appadurai, 169 and 185; Patrick Geary, “The Ninth Century Relic Trade: A Response to Popular Piety?” in *Religion and People*, ed. Obelkevich, 8–19. The relics of the ascetic St. Antony (ca. 251–356) are a case in point. In 561, Antony’s bodily remains were removed to Alexandria, transferred to Constantinople in 635, and then taken to France in the wake of the Crusades. Since 1491, they have been preserved, although not fully intact, in the Church of St. Julien in Arles. Fragments have been distributed to churches in Rome and other places throughout Europe. See John Anthony McGuckin, “Martyr Devotion in the Alexandrian School: Origen to Athanasius,” in *Ecclesiastical History Society and Diana Wood, Martyrs and Martyrologies*, 35–45. McGuckin notes his personal ownership of a relic. For the distancing of the laity from relics, see Hahn, “Seeing and Believing: The Construction of Sanctity in Early-Medieval Saints’ Shrines,” esp. 1092–1106, for shrines in the early medieval West.
- 69 On January 12, 1199, Pope Innocent III issued the first bull of canonization. During the course of the thirteenth century, the process of evaluating proffered evidence was formalized and refined. The procedure involved canon lawyers, proctors, translators, scribes, and others trained in canon and Roman law.
- 70 *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice: Giovanni Alberti, 1612), 510 (*maraviglia*) and 532 (*miracolo*). For notions of the miraculous in late medieval Europe, see Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 217–65. In addition to the *maraviglia-miracolo* distinction, another is worth noting. According to David Gentilcore, “Contesting Illness in Early Modern Naples: *Miracolati*, Physicians and the Congregation of Rites,” *Past and Present*, 148 (1995), 134, the distinction between “a miracle” and “a grace” was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often vague since there seems to have been a sliding scale: “‘pure miracle,’ ‘miracle,’ ‘special’ or ‘singular grace’ and ‘grace’ – to say nothing of the fudge ‘miraculous grace.’” In fact, this “fudge” has deep roots, as is illustrated, for example, by St. Chrysostom’s Homily delivered in Antioch: “... but it was mere grace that wrought all these miracles.”
- 71 Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 42–46. Also see the indispensable Vauchez, *La sainteté en Occident*; Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Pierre Delooz, *Sociologie et canonizations* (Liège: Faculté de Droit, 1969).
- 72 Giuseppe Abate, ed., “S. Rosa da Viterbo, terziaria francescana (1233–1251): Fontistiche della vita e loro revisione critica,” *Miscellanea francescana*, 52 (1952), 113–278; Zeffirino

- Lazzeri, ed., “Il processo di Chiara d’Assisi,” *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 13 (1920), 403–50.
- 73 Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 92.
- 74 Cicconi, ed., *Il Compendio del processo*, 58–59 (miracle no. 28).
- 75 Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta (Parma: Guanda, 1991), 3:20.
- 76 Theologians – Thomas Aquinas being a principal example – did not necessarily agree with the position. See Kleinberg, “Proving Sanctity,” 197–99.
- 77 The Sacra Congregazione dei Riti was but one of fifteen policy-making curial departments (*dicasteri*) resulting from Pope Pius V’s *Immensa aeterni Dei*, January 22, 1588. Papa, *Le cause di canonizzazione*, 29–30.
- 78 Ditchfield, “How Not to Be a Counter-Reformation Saint,” 383; Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy*, 219; Ditchfield, “Sanctity in Early Modern Italy,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 47 (1996), 98–112. Also see Papa, *Le cause di canonizzazione*; and Noyes, “A Me Toccato Masticare Pillole Amare,” 2–71. However, papal policy remained inconsistent until the 1620s. See Simon Ditchfield, “Tridentine Worship and the Cult of Saints,” in Hsia, *Reform and Expansion, 1500–1660*, 201–24.
- 79 Ditchfield, “How Not to Be a Counter-Reformation Saint,” 382.
- 80 Burke, “How to Be a Counter-Reformation Saint,” 47; and Louis Marshall, “Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 47 (1994), 503, n. 43. Sixtus’s successor, Gregory XIV, would add Roch to the Roman martyrology, establishing August 16 as his feast day.
- 81 Ditchfield, “How Not to Be a Counter-Reformation Saint,” 380.
- 82 Ditchfield, “Tridentine Worship and the Cult of Saints,” in Hsia, *Reform and Expansion, 1500–1660*, 206–7. Also see Sofia Boesch Gajano and Lucia Sebastiani, eds., *Culto dei santi, istituzioni e classi sociali in età preindustriale* (Aquila and Rome: L. U. Japadre, 1984); Burke, “How to Be a Counter-Reformation Saint,” 45–55; Ditchfield, “Thinking with Saints.”
- 83 Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism*, 107.
- 84 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1249.
- 85 Although the recorded proceedings of Nicholas’s *causa* suggest that it also captured the popular voice, the shaping of evidence that inevitably resulted from testimony taken and recorded in accordance with twenty-two prescribed procedural articles casts doubt on the claim. Cicconi, ed., *Il Compendio del processo*, 47: “De quibus ante et post mortem dicti Nicolay fuit et est in illis partibus publica vox et fama.”
- 86 Trevor Dean, “Criminal Justice in Mid-Fifteenth Century Bologna,” in *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Dean and Lowe, 17. According to Nielsen, “The development of legal science in both the Medieval Church and State was itself increasingly under the sway of inherited traditions of Roman law which were revived in the twelfth century. . . . One central influence [of this revival] is related to the very name given to the new tribunals. The Roman law recognized three types of criminal accusations and procedures based upon them: *accusatio* [charged by the victim or his/her heirs], *denunciatio* [charged by local officials], and *inquisitio*. See Donald A. Nielsen, “Rationalization in Medieval Europe: The Inquisition and Sociocultural Change,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 2 (1988), 224.
- 87 Rubin, *Images and Identity*, 115. Also see Laura Ikins Stern, “Inquisition Procedure in Early Fifteenth-Century Florence,” *Law and History Review*, 8 (1990), 297–308; and Andrea Zorzi, “The Judicial System in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Dean and Lowe, 40–58.
- 88 Dean, *Crime and Justice*, 93.
- 89 Masa, ed., *Il “Libro dei Miracoli” della Madonna di Tirano*, 70, miracle no. 14.
- 90 Masa, ed., *Il “Libro dei Miracoli” della Madonna di Tirano*, 113, miracle no. 56.
- 91 *Legenda Assidua*, in *Vita Prima di S. Antonio*, 402–4, as cited in Antonio Volpato, “Pubblicità del miracolo e certificazione delle testimonianze (secoli XIII–XIV),” in *Notai, miracoli e culti dei santi*, ed. Michetti, 482.
- 92 Domenici, *Compendio*, 50r (Miele, 148).
- 93 Volpato, “Pubblicità del miracolo e certificazione delle testimonianze (secoli XIII–XIV),” in *Notai, miracoli e culti dei santi*, ed. Michetti, 453–55 and 461–65.
- 94 Kleinberg, “Proving Sanctity,” 192.
- 95 The literature on Mary is immense. Among the sources used here, are Ellington, *From*

- Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*; Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*; Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event, 1000–1215* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), esp. chap. 8, “The Miracles of the Virgin,” 132–65; Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Hilda Graef, *The Devotion to Our Lady* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1963); and for early legends, Mary Vincentine Gripsky, “Mary Legends in Italian Manuscripts in the Major Libraries of Italy” (Parts I and II), *Medieval Studies*, 14 (1952), 9–47, and 15 (1953), 14–46.
- 96 For the debates concerning the designation, see Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, 55–65.
- 97 Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, IV, 3, as cited in Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, 51.
- 98 Maurus Fitzgerald, ed., *The Catholic Book of Prayers* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing, 2005), 75–76.
- 99 Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas, as cited in Pelikan, *Mary through the Centuries*, 132.
- 100 Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 4.
- 101 Corner, *Ecclesiae Torcellanae*, 165–70.
- 102 Possibly this reflects the existence of *topoi*. For example, Corbetta’s Madonna dei Miracoli is not unlike Prato’s Madonne delle Carceri. The latter is reported to have detached herself from the wall on which she had been painted, descended into the abandoned prison vault, and proceeded to tidy up. At three in the afternoon on April 17, 1555, Corbetta’s Madonna reportedly descended from the wall on which she was painted and took a stroll around the piazza. Similarly, just as Aurelia del Prete’s feet fell off when she cursed the Madonna dell’Arco, so did a soldier in Lucca lose his arm when he blasphemed the Madonna in the presence of her image beneath the Porta dei Borghi.
- 103 Krüger, “Authenticity and Fiction,” 37–69, examines the issue of authenticity with a different intent. His probing study is essential reading.
- 104 The quoted passages come from a notarized document dated 1612 recounting these events; see the appendix to Carlo Carosi, “Il documento notarile, prova privilegiata in materia di eventi straordinari e miracolosi. La Madonna Bianca di Portovenere (1399),” in *Notai, miracoli e culto dei santi*, ed. Michetti, 92–95. The transformations noted here are not uncommon. See, for example, Luca Landucci, *A Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516*, trans. Alice de Rosen Jervis (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1927), 35: “At this time there was much talk of the worship of an image of Our Lady of Bibbona.... It is, namely, a Virgin seated and holding the dead Christ in her arms after He has been taken down from the Cross.... This worship began on the 5th of April, when it was transfigured, that is, it changed from blue to red, and from red to black and diverse colors. And this is said to have happened many times.”
- 105 The rise begins during the twelfth century. Wilhelm Gumpfenberg’s *Atlas Marianus*, 1657, a four-volume survey of more than fifteen hundred worldwide sites and sanctuaries sacred to Mary, can be used as a measure of the fervor of Marian devotionism.
- 106 Admittedly, so-called miracle-working images, like saints’ tombs, were not always accessible to the public. Veiled by curtains and covered by shutters, many were revealed with great ceremony only on special feast days. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, enshrinement structures asserted the *praesentia* of the divine. For the veiling of sacred images and the concept of *Revelatio*, see Johann Konrad Eberlein, “The Curtain in Raphael’s Sistine Madonna,” *Art Bulletin*, 65 (1983), 61–77, and a subsequent exchange between Eberlein and Richard Cocke in “Letters,” *Art Bulletin*, 66 (1984), 327–31; Alessandro Nova, “Hangings, Curtains, and Shutters of Sixteenth-Century Lombard Altarpieces,” in *Italian Altarpieces*, ed. Borsook and Gioffredi, 177–89. Although Leonardo da Vinci’s description of the response of the faithful at such an event, *Treatise on Painting*, 1:20, throws into question what, exactly, is the source of the reaction – the artist’s skillful presentation of the referent or the represented saint – his detailing of people casting themselves “to the ground, worshipping and praying ... for the repairing of their lost health and eternal salvation” conveys what must have been a routine occurrence. Certainly it accords with the later description by Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1231, decades later of the pious, who upon seeing the Veronica presented in St.

- Peter's during Holy Week, "prostrate on the ground, most of them with tears in their eyes [and] with cries of commiseration."
- 107 Walsham, "Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission to England," 783.
- 108 Maniura, "Ex votos, Art and Pious Performance," 412–13.
- 109 It should be remembered that votive panels were available through vendors who traveled with market fairs.
- 110 The decision to invoke and subsequently honor more than a single saint, including two or more manifestations of the Madonna, was a personal decision but also one that seems to have been informed by local practice. Evidence suggests that the honoring – and visualization – of multiple intercessors (as many as four) was most common in Naples.
- 111 Andrea Bayer, ed., *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), cat. no. 85; and for an example dated 1525–30, Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, eds., *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, 126.
- 112 Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, 116. As the illustrated *Discorsi di Pietro Paolo Magni Piacentino sopra il modo di sanguinare, attaccar le sanguisughe, & le ventose, far le fregagioni vessorij a corpi humani* (1586), indicates, medical treatises not directly related to obstetrics also evince the male attendance on postpartum women and their presumed ills. See Evelyn Lincoln, "Curating the Body," *Word & Image*, 17 (2001), 57.
- 113 The miracle book of Tirano records Signora Zentilla, the daughter of Count Dorigia di Arco and wife of Count Nicola di Lodrono, surviving a Caesarian section, as did the child. Two years later, she visited the Madonna's shrine "with her offering." Masa, ed., *Il "Libro dei Miracoli" della Madonna di Tirano*, 129, miracle no. 72.
- alle Beata Vergine Maria Madre di Dio, & in un giorno ne fu liberato. 15 Julio 1590." For an example of the phrase *in pericolo di morte*, see Isabella Gagliardi, "I miracoli della Madonna delle Carceri in due codici della Biblioteca Roncioniana di Prato," in *Santa Maria delle Carceri*, ed. Benvenuti, 109, miracle no. 56. For the pervasive use of the *topos* of the inadequacy of doctors (*disperato dell'aiuto de' medici*) see, for example, the case of Caterina of Parma, in Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 61; Ottavio Cacao whose high fever suddenly broke when he prayed for relief to the Madonna dell'Arco, in Domenici, *Compendio*, 57v, miracle no. 65 (Miele, 164); and Gaspare, the son of Gabriele del Dugo of Brescia, who stepped back from death's door by the grace of the Madonna di Tirano, in Masa, ed., *Il "Libro dei Miracoli" della Madonna di Tirano*, 83, miracle no. 27. Many of the miracles attributed to the relics of St. Stephen and recounted by St. Augustine in *The City of God*, XXII.8 also report the failure of physicians.
- 5 Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 63v (miracle no. 25); Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 72: "Una donna liberata dall'humore melanonico, per la gratia ricevuta, offerse una tavolatta con la narratione del fatto."
- 6 See, for example, Wendy Steiner, "Pictorial Narrativity," in *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 145–77. For a succinct review of the use of the term, see Ira Westergård, "Which Narrative? The Case of Narrative Subject in Fifteenth-Century Altarpieces," in *The Travelling Concept of Narrative*, ed. Hyvärinen and Mykkänen, 60–64. For a definition or account of how narrative can be used in analyzing visual art, see Bal, "Narrative and the Visual and Literary Arts"; and Bal, *Narratology*.
- 7 Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip*, 4.
- 8 Wendy Steiner, *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 8. Arguably, the criticism leveled against art historians' "loose" use of the term "narrative" is not unlike the observed "absence of anything like an accepted definition of narrative" among the discipline's detractors since the "vast majority" of literary scholars likewise "carry on without over much regard to ... definitions." See

CHAPTER IV. NARRATIVE MODES

- 1 Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 79.
- 2 Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing*, 181.
- 3 Richard V. Ericson, "How Journalists Visualize Fact," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 560 (1998), 84.
- 4 The inserted phrases in the following sentences come from an array of miracle books. For a typical entry, see, for example, Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 51: "Girolamo Cataneo fece voto

- Sternberg, "Telling in Time (II)," 464; David Rudrum, "On the Very Idea of a Definition of Narrative: A Reply to Marie-Laure Ryan," *Narrative*, 14 (2006), 203.
- 9 Velden, *The Donor's Image*, 213ff. As Hugo van der Velden's insightful study of votive portraits demonstrates, a similar circumstance informs how we understand the functional form of votive objects, including "narrative" pictures. In a chart differentiating votive "acts" from votive "objects," he separated the latter into two categories: "non-utilitarian" and "utilitarian." The "utilitarian" includes "consumptive" things such as money for alms and commodities like grain, oil, and firewood for the sustenance of the clergy. "Oblatory" things that "played a role in church services" like liturgical vestments as well as altarpieces are similarly classified. Among the votives tagged "non-utilitarian" are "narrative" paintings. Hugo van der Velden's description of these pictures as images that "generally depicted the votary, the patron and the incident occasioning the vow" makes it clear that he is speaking about votive paintings. Finally, he distinguishes "iconic" images, which range from "simple wax limbs" to elaborately crafted effigies and portrait busts, as yet another "non-utilitarian" group of works. As useful as this division may be, it nevertheless lays bare the muddling matrix of comparative labels like "narrative" versus "iconic."
 - 10 Shapiro, *Words and Pictures*, 9.
 - 11 Wolfgang Kemp, "Narrative," trans. David Britt, in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Schiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 58. Indeed, visual narratives were sometimes structured solely from the pictorial conventions associated with the story without, it appears, any direct engagement with the textual source. On this point, it is worth considering Shapiro, *Words and Pictures*, 9: "A great part of visual art in Europe from late antiquity to the 18th century represents subjects taken from a written text. The painter and sculptor had the task of translating the word – religious, historical, or poetic – into a visual image. It is true that many artists did not consult the text but copied existing illustrations either closely or with some change. But for us today the intelligibility of that copy, as of the original, rests finally on its correspondence to a known text through the recognizable forms of the pictured objects and actions signified by the words. The picture, we assume further, corresponds to the concept or memory image associated with the words."
 - 12 Bal, "Narrative and the Visual and Literary Arts." Well before Pope Gregory the Great wrote his frequently cited letters to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles in which he set forth a missionary use for images and asserted that pictures are to the ignorant what Scripture is to the educated, image comprehension was coupled with texts.
 - 13 Wolf, "Narrative and Narrativity: A Narratological Reconceptualization and its Applicability to the Visual Arts," 180, has noted the persistent use of the terms "narrative" or "narrativity" in discussions of pictures to reference "some literary narrative, or the representation of any kind of action in a picture, as opposed to static, descriptive images, but hardly ever the *representation of a story proper*."
 - 14 Gerhard Wolf, "Icons and sites. Cult images of the Virgin in Medieval Rome," in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 23, points out, "*Eikon* merely means 'image' (the corresponding Latin word is *imago*), a term with a rich semantic field in both Classical culture and the Christian tradition." He also notes that an image can "obtain an iconic identity through the process of framing or through their stylistic mode," or from an "association with particular iconic models [as opposed to] ... artistic or programmatic selection" (24). As for our use of the term *istoria*, it still suffers from Leon Battista Alberti's idiosyncratic usage despite efforts by many to counter a reductive application. See Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350–1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Mark Jarzombek, *On Leon Battista Alberti: His Literary and Aesthetic Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Anthony Grafton, "Historia and Istorìa: Alberti's Terminology in Context," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*, 8 (1999), 37–68.
 - 15 Bisserva V. Pentcheva, "The Performative Icon," *Art Bulletin*, 88 (2006), 634.

- 16 The question of the essentialist or nonessentialist relationship of the icon to the represented person is a complex one that cannot be addressed here. It should be noted however that in the centuries of debate over the nature of the relationship of the materially present image and the absent prototype, miracle-working images were typically understood as repositories of divine presence.
- 17 Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 79.
- 18 *Sancti Gregorii Magni Epistolarum Lib. XI, Epis. 13*, as cited in Davis-Weyer, *Early Medieval Art*, 47–49. The statement appears in the pope's letters to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles written in 599 and 600. Kessler has placed the full statement in the context of Gregory's "theory of a missionary art." See Herbert L. Kessler, "Pictorial Narrative and Church Mission in Sixth-Century Gaul," in *Pictorial Narrative in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Studies in the History of Art, vol. 16, ed. Herbert L. Kessler and Marianna Shreve Simpson (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1985), 75–91; Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing*, 1 and 28. Also see the seminal text by Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*; and Westergård, "Which Narrative? The Case of Narrative Subject in Fifteenth-Century Altarpieces," in *The Travelling Concept of Narrative*, ed. Hyvärinen and Mykkänen, 61.
- 19 Shapiro, *Words and Pictures*, 17–36.
- 20 Labov, "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax," in *Language in the Inner City*, 359–60.
- 21 For the definition of narrative, see Bal, "Narrative and the Visual and Literary Arts." For differing notions of the number of events composing a narrative, see, for example, Gerald Prince, "Revisiting Narrativity," in *Grenzenüberschreitungen: Narratologie im Kontext/Transcending Boundaries: Narratology in Context*, ed. Walter Grünzweig and Andreas Solbach (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1999), 43: "Narrative has been ... defined as the representation of at least one event"; Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin: Mouton, 1982), 4: "Narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events in a time sequence." Labov has divided conversational narrative into "complete narratives [which] have a beginning, middle, and end but lack the refinements provided in fully developed stories," and "minimal narratives," which report an action sequence that has a single temporal juncture." Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 360–61.
- 22 Shapiro, *Words and Pictures*, 17–36.
- 23 Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 359–60: "... we define a *minimal narrative* as a sequence of two clauses which are *temporally ordered*." Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 53: "A minimal story consists of three conjoined events.... The first and third events are stative, the second is active.... The three events are conjoined by the three conjunctive features in such a way that (a) the first event precedes the second in time and the second precedes the third, and (b) the second event causes the third." Yet recapitulating a past experience in chronological sequence is not necessarily the principal criterion of "narrative." See, for example, Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 30; and Sternberg, "Telling in Time (II)."
- 24 The term "single-setting narrative" is used by Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip*, 4. "Double-time structuring" is a phrase used by Ann Rigney, "Narrative and Historical Representation," *Poetics Today*, 12 (1991), 592.
- 25 For a useful discussion, see Warman Welliver, "Narrative Method and Narrative Form in Masaccio's *Tribute Money*," *Art Quarterly*, 1 (1977), 40–58. Also see Andrews, *Story and Space in Renaissance Art*. Andrews argues convincingly that far from disappearing with the spread of perspective, "continuous narrative becomes a more vital part of quattrocento art ... and retain[ed] that vitality in a wide range of imagery and in a variety of contexts, throughout the [fifteenth] century and even beyond" (11).
- 26 This may reflect Ghiberti's greater interest in conveying "the deep and conflicting sentiments of the narrative." Gary M. Radke, ed., *The Gates of Paradise: Lorenzo Ghiberti's Masterpiece* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 35.
- 27 The definition of *figura* is cited in *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, 1612, and comes from Dante, *Purgatory*, canto 10. 40–45, a passage in which he describes a statue of the archangel of the Annunciation. Although the statue was made of marble and therefore silent, Dante says he "could have sworn" he

- heard the figure speak yet, even if it did not, the words “Behold, the Servant of the Lord” (*Ecce ancilla Dei*) were, he says, “imprinted in her attitude . . . as expressly as a *figura* stamped in wax.” For a discussion of the concept, see Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 48–49 and 73–74.
- 28 The painting depicts what seems to have been true. “On every street corner in the back alleys of Venice [and, one can add, other cities], one can still find the Virgin Mary.” This statement opens Edward Muir’s essay “The Virgin on the Street Corner: The Place of the Sacred in Italian Cities,” in *The Italian Renaissance: The Essential Readings*, ed. Paula Findlen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 151–66.
- 29 Chambers and Dean, *Clean Hands and Rough Justice*, 12. Commenting on the use of torture in Bologna, Dean notes, “Although the statutes, in regulating the use of torture, declared that many officials applied it without a second thought, its use is rarely recorded.” Trevor Dean, “Criminal Justice in Mid-fifteenth Century Bologna,” in *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Dean and Lowe, 21.
- 30 Sebastian de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 34.
- 31 Chambers and Dean, *Clean Hands and Rough Justice*, 102–3.
- 32 Giardino and Rak, *Per grazia ricevuta*, 435, cat. no. 783.
- 33 Giardino and Rak, *Per grazia ricevuta*, cat. no. 782.
- 34 Giardino and Rak, *Per grazia ricevuta*, 434, cat. no. 770.
- 35 Time has reduced a fourth panel to mostly bare wood although the victim, suspended, is discernible at right. The four panels are illustrated with brief descriptions in *Le tavolette votive della Madonna dei Miracoli di Lonigo*, cat. nos. 57, 115, 283, and 284.
- 36 *Tavolette* at Cesena have been stylistically grouped: hand “A,” hand “B,” hand “C,” etc. One of the *corda* pictures has been placed in Group “C,” the other in either Group “B” or “C.” Faranda, *Fides tua te salvum fecit*, 156, no. 23, and 174, no. 85.
- 37 The device is not wholly legible and remains unidentified.
- 38 Morigia, *Historia & Origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 82–83. Communities also offered paintings of an intercessor, as is demonstrated, for example, by the large canvas of the efficacious Madonna of Oropa in the company of four saints, including Roch and Sebastian, by Bernardino Lanino. Faranda, “*Fides tua te salvum fecit*,” 184, cat. no. 118. The painting remains at the Sanctuary of the Madonna of Oropa in Piedmont.
- 39 Masa, ed., *Il “Libro dei Miracoli” della Madonna di Tirano*, 107, miracle no. 50.
- 40 Two years later Figiovanni would be taken into the confidence of Cardinal Giulio de’Medici. See Gino Corti, “Una ricordanza di Giovan Battista Figiovanni,” *Paragone*, n.s., 15/175 (1964), 9–31. Thereafter, his name is most closely associated with the building of the New Sacristy in San Lorenzo. See, for example, Caroline Elam, “The Site and Early Building History of Michelangelo’s New Sacristy,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 23 (1979), 155–86; and Sheryl E. Reiss, “The Ginori Corridor of San Lorenzo and the Building History of the New Sacristy,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 52 (1993), 339–43. I am grateful to Louis A. Waldman for directing me to this panel.
- 41 Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip*, 1–2.
- 42 Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip*, 5.
- 43 See note 23.
- 44 Ann Rigney, “Narrative and Historical Representation,” *Poetics Today*, 12 (1991), 592. Another particularly nice example is at the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell’Arco. On the left, a galley is pictured caught in roiling waves and raging winds. In the next frame, the ship sails on calm waters.
- 45 Labov and Waletzky, “Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience,” in *Essays on the Visual and Verbal Arts*, ed. Helm, 12–44; Robinson, “Personal Narratives Reconsidered”; Small, “Believing in Art,” 294. Small, who focuses on photographic ex-votos, makes this point in distinguishing between painted and sculptural ex-votos. She does not make the distinction between testimonial function and narrative modes that is argued in this book.
- 46 Images “through” (*col mezzo loro*) which God works miracles (*Dio abbia operato manifestamente segni e miracoli*) constituted the fifth of eight types of sacred images identified by Bologna’s archbishop. Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, bk. 1, chap. 16, in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 2:198.

- 47 The term *scuola* was used in Venice in reference to a “devotional confraternity of laymen, a type of institution characteristic of late medieval piety, and known elsewhere in Italy under various names, including *confraternità* and *compagnia*.” Venice’s *scuole* came under secular jurisdiction. Around 1500, the city had at least 210 such institutions that varied in broad-based membership from thirty to more than four hundred. Peter Humphrey, “Competitive Devotions: The Venetian *Scuole Piccole* as Donors of Altarpieces in the Years around 1500,” *Art Bulletin*, 70 (1988), 401–2.
- 48 Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 135.
- 49 *Incunabulum*, or the *liber miraculorum*, of the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista, as cited in Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 135 and 144.
- 50 Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 135–64.
- 51 Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 138–39.
- 52 Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, 139.
- 53 I am thankful to Dottore Loris Pasini and Professore Giancarlo Turrotti who took the time to walk me through the sanctuary and discuss with me its many interesting features.
- 54 For a brief history of the site, see L. Novelli and L. D’Elia, *Abbazia S. Maria del Monte* (Cesena: Edizione d’Arte Marconi, 1999).
- 55 Rosand and Muraro, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*, 109. In addition to the print, “a number of popular publications devoted to the miracles of the saint and his image” appeared in the 1520s.
- 56 Rosand and Muraro, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*, 110. At the end of his life, Titian again inserted a *tavoletta* into one of his works. It appears in the lower right corner of the *Pietà*, a work associated with the artist’s own tomb. Whether the *tavoletta* has significance to this is disputed.
- 57 The accuracy of the specifics offered by Francesco Diedo in his *vita* of Roch are questionable, including the saint’s proposed death in 1327, a date that precedes the advent of plague that decimated Italy’s population in 1348. See Louise Marshall, “Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 47 (1994), 502–3.
- 58 Roch’s life includes familiar elements such as an aged and barren mother whose prayers are answered by the birth of a blessed child (Nicholas of Tolentino is another example), and signs of blessedness are immediately apparent (Roch had a birthmark in the shape of a cross). See Vaslef, “The Role of St. Roch as a Plague Saint,” 103–20.
- 59 The report about Sixtus was made to the doge by the Venetian ambassador to Rome. Vaslef, “The Role of St. Roch as Plague Saint,” 138–39.
- 60 For an excellent study on the latter, see Noyes, “On the Fringe of Center,” 800–46.
- 61 Noyes, “On the Fringe of Center,” 817–18.
- 62 Holmes discusses these in chapter 6 of *Miraculous Images in Renaissance Florence*.
- 63 John Foxe, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe: With a Life of the Martyrologist, and Vindication of His Work* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 4:171. Foxe reports that he was brought before the bishop of London in 1529 to recant Reformation heresy, specifically his views on the pope, images, and sacraments. Also see Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 161–203, esp. 174–77.
- 64 Ferretti, as cited in *Lo straordinario*, ed. Turchini, 26.
- 65 Pierroberto Scaramella, *Le Madonne del Purgatorio: iconografia e religione in Campania tra rinascimento e controriforma* (Genoa: Marietti, 1991), 185–90; Gentilcore, *Healers and Healing*, 21.
- 66 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Urb. Lat. 1064, part 2, fol. 790r. I am most grateful to Steven Ostrow, who so generously directed me to this reference. Although the document identifies the crowd to be composed of *le donne*, *tavolette* indicate that males and females participated equally in the practice of votive donation.
- 67 While Prospero Fontana used the format of the *vita* altarpiece, other artists such as Lorenzo Lotto illustrated the fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary in medallions that would evoke rosary beads. Lotto’s altarpiece of 1539 is in San Nicolò, Congoli.
- 68 Rosand and Muraro, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*, 111. A pen-and-ink drawing attributed to Annibale Carracci offers an Italian example of the use of Marian images purchased in the marketplace and tacked to a domestic interior wall. Sadly, the current whereabouts of the sheet is unknown; however, a full-page illustration of it can be found in Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, eds., *At Home in the Renaissance*, 326, fig. 22.4.
- 69 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the*

- Collection (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 135.
- 70 Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy*, 235; and Laura A. Smoller, “Miracle, Memory, and Meaning in the Canonization of Vincent Ferrer, 1453–1454,” *Speculum*, 73 (1998), 429–54. For the iconography of child-healing miracles, also see Hoeniger, “The Child Miracles in Simone Martini’s Beato Agostino Novello Altarpiece”; Silvano Cavazza, “La doppia morte: resurrezione e battesimo in un rito del seicento,” *Quaderni Storici*, 50 (1982), 560–80. Cavazza appears in English translation by Mary M. Gallucci as “Double Death: Resurrection and Baptism in a Seventeenth-Century Rite,” in *History from Crime*, ed. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 1–31. It is worth noting a pointed juxtaposition of scenes commemorating the postmortem efficacy of St. Peter Martyr in the Spanish Chapel in Sta. Maria Novella, Florence. To the left of the doorway providing access to the room is a scene of pilgrims jostling one another to get close to the saint’s tomb. Its pendant, to the right of the room’s entrance is a scene of St. Peter Martyr healing Agatha. Infant resuscitation appears frequently in predellas featuring the postmortem life of St. Anthony of Padua. See, for example, Mariano d’Antonio’s *vita* predella of the saint included on an altarpiece painted in 1455 for the Church of San Francesco al Prato and now in the Galleria Nazionale dell’Umbria, Perugia. In addition to a scene of pilgrims gathered around Anthony’s tomb and in addition to other scenes of interventions, depictions of the saint raising a dead child and another that shows him saving a child falling from a terrace accords with accounts of his miraculous life.
- CHAPTER V. SIGNS OF FAITH, SIGNS OF SUPERSTITION
- 1 Martino del Rio (Martin Delrio), *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex. Quibus continetur accurate curiosarum atrium, et vanarum superstitionum confutatio* (Munich: Pietri Henningii, 1617), bk. 3, part 2, quest. 4, section 7, 462.
- 2 For the letter from Casaubon, a noted Protestant scholar, to Scaliger, see Marisa Bass, “Justus Lipsius and His Silver Pen,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 70 (2007), 178.
- 3 Morigia, *Historia & origine fella famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, 33.
- 4 The reading and refutation of Hierieia’s *Definition (Horos)* occurred days earlier, at the sixth session on October 6. For the Nicene decree concerning images, see *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Tanner, 1:133–37. For further discussion, see Giakalis, *Images of the Divine*.
- 5 Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing*, 122. The exact date of the promulgation of the first iconoclastic edict is in doubt. Following a period of state-sanctioned iconoclasm, Irene, acting as regent for her son, joined forces with the patriarch Tarasius to reinstate the cult of images in 780. As reported in *De sacris aedibus Deiparae as Fontem*, this included votive portraits. She had mosaics of herself and her son “handing over the [votive] offerings ... so as to express their faith and to proclaim for all time the miracle [of the healing] of the hemorrhage through the setting up [of the portraits] and the offering [of gold-threaded curtains, a crown and liturgical vessels].” See Cyril Mango, ed., *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 149–57. To this it is worth adding the following from Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 103: “From the earliest days of the icon, state worship of the imperial image is abundantly documented. When Christianity became the state religion, the Christians had to deal with this worship as a possible conflict. What they refused to the pagan god-emperor, however, they willingly granted to the Christian representative of the state.”
- 6 The popes occupying the *sedes apostolica* during the different sessions refused reform of the papacy, the third office of the church, to be a topic of discussion. In a penetrating study that considers the interfacing of “reform concerns and even iconoclastic impulses” with “an especially tense and productive relationship with art-making in the early sixteenth century,” Alexander Nagel argues that “iconophobia in Italy was more than a matter of a few occasional disruptions perpetrated by marginal heretics.” Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, esp. 197–285. Also see O’Malley, *Trent*, 205–217.

- 7 Because the king saw the council as a threat, the French had boycotted the earlier assemblies. For documents concerning French proposals, see *Concilium Tridentinum: Diariorum, actorum, epistolarum, tractatum nova collectio*, ed. Societas Goerresiana (Freiburg: Herder, 1910–2001), 13:114–40. I am indebted to Professor John W. O'Malley, who generously reviewed the matter of Tridentine policy with me and provided me with a draft of his insightful and thought-provoking essay “Trent, Sacred Images, and Catholics’ Senses of the Sensuous” prior to its publication in Marcia B. Hall and Tracy E. Cooper, *The Sensuous in the Counter Reformation Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). O'Malley's essay discusses the French proposal and the response to it by the papal legates.
- 8 For the resolution on the intercession of saints, veneration of relics, and the honoring of images, see *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Tanner, 2:774–76. Additionally, see Hubert Jedin, “Entstehung und Tragweite des Trienter Dekrets über die Bilderverehrung,” in Hubert Jedin, *Kirche des Glaubens, Kirche der Geschichte. Ausgewählte Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Freiburg: Herder, 1966), 4:460–98. Also see Robert Bireley, S.J., “Redefining Catholicism: Trent and Beyond,” in Hsia, *Reform and Expansion, 1500–1660*, 145–61.
- 9 Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 220.
- 10 Noyes, “A Me Toccato Masticare Pillole Amare,” 80–83. Also see Christian Hecht, *Katolische Bildertheologie in Zeitalter von Gegenreformation und Barock: Studien zu Traktaten von Johannes Molanus, Gabriele Paleotti und Anderen Autoren* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1997), and Giuseppe Scavizzi, *The Controversy on Images from Calvin to Baronio* (New York: P. Lang, 1982). For the use of sacramentals, see Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 58–59 and 219–21. For an example of a professed cure from holy oil, see Domenici, *Compendio*, 40v (Miele, 136): “Horatio Campanile, havendo il padre inferno con febre gravissima per più di due mesi, la mattina che fu disperato dalli medici venne in persona a raccomandarlo alla Madonna santissima dell’Arco, et tornando a Napoli l’unse con l’olio della lampada, et fu guarito li 13 di ottobre [1598].”
- 11 See [Chapter 2](#), note 132.
- 12 Decorum looms large in the discussion. Art-historical scholarship reflects this. See, for example, Robert Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Téchne to Metatechne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Robert Gaston, “Attention in Court: Visual Decorum in Medieval Prayer Theory and Early Italian Art,” in *Visions of Holiness: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Andrew Ladis and Shelley E. Zuraw (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia 2001), 137–62.
- 13 Molanus, *De Picturis et Imaginibus Sacris* (1570, revised and expanded edition 1594), as cited in David Freedberg, “Johannes Molanus on Provocative Paintings. *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum*, Book II, Chapter 42,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 34 (1971), 243. The following sentence in Molanus's text, which quotes Canon 100 of the Trullan Synod, which convened in 692, stands as a warning to artists: “And if anyone should try to do it, he must be excommunicated.”
- 14 Gasparo Contarini, *The Office of a Bishop* (*De officio viri boni et probi episcopi*), ed. and trans. John Patrick Donnelly, S.J. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 128–29.
- 15 See, for example, the proceedings published from the Council of Malines, 1607, in *Acta Conciliorum et epistolae decretales, ac constitutiones Summorum Pontificum*, 10: col. 1953.
- 16 As secretary of state to his uncle, Pope Pius IV, Borromeo had been deeply involved in the proceedings at Trent, albeit from a distance.
- 17 *Acta Conciliorum et epistolae decretales, ac constitutiones Summorum Pontificum*, 10: col. 812.
- 18 Borromeo, *Instructiones*, in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 3:45. The *Instructiones* was reprinted several times, including its incorporation in the *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* compiled by Pietro Galensio and Cardinal Borromeo, 1582, as well as reprints in Venice in 1595, Milan in 1599, Brescia in 1603, and Paris in 1643, to name a few. Also see John Alexander, *From Renaissance to Counter-Reformation: The Architectural Patronage of Carlo Borromeo during the Reign of Pius IV* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2007).
- 19 Votorum item tabulae, donaria, ex cera fusiles imagines, et eiusmodi aliae, quae ad memoriam vel recuperatae valetudinis, vel periculi depulsi, vel beneficij divinitus mirabiliterque accepti in ecclesiis ex antiquo more institutoque suspendi solent, cum saepe

- falso, indecoro, turpiter, superstitioseque effingantur; in iis ipsis exprimendis cautio sit supra praescripta.
- 20 Gabriele Paleotti became a cardinal in March 1565 and bishop of Bologna on January 13, 1567. Bologna became an archdiocese in 1582, making Paleotti Bologna's first archbishop.
- 21 The intended subject is described as follows: "Dell'altre cose, come armature, insegne militari, galere, crocodrilli, corna de' cervi, onocrotali, ova dei struzzi, animali stranieri, et cose simili, se si convengono nelle chiese." Paleotti did, however, include a chapter, number 7, in the second book of the *Discorso* focusing on "Delle pitture superstizione." Although concerned principally with *how* an artist represents a sacred subject, that is with issues of decorum, Paleotti does acknowledge the errors of spectators who wrongfully set lighted candles before an image or credit a representation with altering the weather. See Paleotti, *Discorso*, in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 2:282–85. For Terzagio's frontispiece to *Musaeum septalianum* (1664), see Joy Kenseth, ed., *The Age of the Marvelous* (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1991), cat. no. 18, 239–40. Settala's collection was among the most famous encyclopedic museums of the seventeenth century.
- 22 *Acta Conciliorum et epistolae decretales, ac constitutiones Summorum Pontificum*, 10: cols. 807–14.
- 23 *Acta Conciliorum et epistolae decretales, ac constitutiones Summorum Pontificum*, 10: cols. 1953–54.
- 24 Masa, ed., *Il "Libro dei Miracoli" della Madonna di Tirano*, 64, miracle no. 8. Marin Sanudo included the description, which comes from the Venetian patrician Giuseppe da i Urzi nuovi, in his *Diaries*. See Patricia H. Labalme and Laura Sanguineti, eds., *Venice "Città Excelentissima": Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, trans. Linda L. Carroll (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 403. Also see Bowd, "'Honeyed Flies' and 'Sugared Rats.'"
- 25 The foundation stone was laid on March 25, 1505. The church was consecrated in 1528.
- 26 Domenici, *Compendio*, 41r (Miele, 136). The practice has deep roots and took other forms. Before the Madonna dei Miracoli came to prominence at Cesena, devotees ascended the hill to the site to visit the tomb of St. Mauro, a third-century sarcophagus put to reuse. The marble sarcophagus bears traces of their presence. All of the tomb's edges and corners were chipped by pilgrims, who then ground the marble bits to dust, mixed it with water, and drank it. Centuries later in Bologna, the nuns attending the saintly Caterina de' Vigri (1413–63), who was canonized in 1712, offered pilgrims water used to wash her incorruptible body as a curative. I thank Dr. Pasini and Prof. Turrotti for explaining the chip marks on San Mauro's tomb and Kristina Keogh for the practices around St. Caterina.
- 27 Cicconi, ed., *Il Compendio del processo*, 79–84 (miracle nos. 100–12).
- 28 Fra Raimondo Ciucci, *I miracoli d. SS Maria della Quercia*, fols. 5 and 207.
- 29 Morigia, *Historia & origine della famosa Fontana della Madonna di Caravaggio*, cap. 12, 32–34. Here, bathing in curative waters was essential and accounts for the large number of on-site miracles of all kinds.
- 30 The difference between *possessio* and *obsessio* is noted by Sluhovsky: "While in the Middle Ages, and especially following St. Thomas, the [two] terms ... appear interchangeably in records of exorcism, the two words describe different forms of diabolic attacks.... In possession, the demons penetrate the body (but not the soul) of the possessed, and operate within it on the soul. The devil's actions on the soul, however, look as if the demon is residing there too.... In obsession, on the other hand, evil spirits torment the body from outside." Moshe Sluhovsky, "The Devil in the Convent," *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 1406. Magic is generally defined as, "the exercise of preternatural control over nature by human beings, with the assistance of forces more powerful than they." Valerie Flint, as quoted in Scribner, "The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the 'Disenchantment of the World,'" 476. According to Seitz, "one of the most striking statistics" of the Venetian Inquisition is that out of more than one hundred verdicts for alleged *maleficio* issued between 1550 and 1650, there is none finding the defendant guilty. Jonathan Seitz, "'The Root Is Hidden and the Material Uncertain': The Challenges of Prosecuting Witchcraft in Early Modern Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 62 (2009), 103–4. For the challenges confronted by the

- church to take control of remedial religion, see O'Neil, "Magical Healing, Love Magic and the Inquisition in Late Sixteenth-Century Modena," esp. 90–92; and O'Neil, "Sacerdote ovvero strione," esp. 54–56.
- 31 An example of the last named is Rafael Pasini's *Legenda di S. Francesco di Paula* (Treviso: Fabrizio Zanetti, 1602). Also see Lorenzo Baldacchini, *Bibliografia delle stampe popolari religiose del XVI–XVII secolo*. *Biblioteche Vaticane, Alessandrina, Estense* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1980); and Ottavio Francheschini, "L'esorcista," in *Medicina, erbe e magia*, ed. Adani and Tamagnini, 100–15.
- 32 In addition to episodes of Christ casting out the demons, the Apostles were given the authority to "go against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness" in Matthew 10:1–8.
- 33 For a discussion of post-Tridentine images of this kind, see Noyes, "On the Fringe of Center," who illustrates the Greuter print as [fig. 3](#). I do not want to suggest that depictions of exorcism were specifically tied to canonization efforts. The monumental life cycle honoring Filippo Benizzi (ca. 1233–85) painted by Andrea del Sarto in the forecourt of SS. Annunziata in 1510–11, which includes *San Filippo Benizzi Healing the Possessed Woman*, honors a man who was not canonized until April 12, 1671.
- 34 "Ubi multis intremuit mirabilibus: nacque cernebat daemones uariis ruggire cruciatibus, et ante sepulchral sanctorum ululare hominiss luporum uocibus, latrare canum, fremere leonum, sibilare serpentum, mugire taurorum. Alios rotare caput, et post tergum terram vertice tangere, suspensisque pede feminis." Saint Jérôme, *Lettres*, 8 vols., ed. J. Labourt (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1949–63), 5:174. The translation here is from Brown, *The Cult of Saints*, 106.
- 35 Guazzo, *Compendium maleficarum*, bk. 3, chap. 4, 204. Guazzo does not specify the church in which this incident took place, and there can be no doubt that here as elsewhere in his *Compendium* he recognized powerful efficacy in the Agnus Dei fashioned of consecrated wax.
- 36 Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 227.
- 37 Pierre Boaistuau, *Histoires prodigieuses extraites de plusieurs fameux auturs, grecs & latins, sacrez & prophanes* (Paris: Charles Macé à l'enseigne de la Pyramide, 1575), Aa recto. In the 1598 edition, a crucifix rather than an image of the Virgin sits atop the altar.
- 38 Although Lottini's book re-presents Luca Ferrini's *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli miracoli della Nunziata*, 1593, 79, miracle no. 34, the illustration in the earlier miracle book shows, in accordance with other illustrations, the exorcism resulting from a vision, a cloud-ensconced image of Gabriele appearing to Mary.
- 39 Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, bk. 1, chap. 16, in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 2:198.
- 40 The illustration in Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata*, 79, differs. It pictures the four women in an undefined interior space. Mary's presence here takes the form familiar to *tavolette* of this date: the Madonna appears shrouded in a heavenly cloud in the upper-left corner of the image.
- 41 The painting, now in the Denver Art Museum (accession no. 1961.171), has been linked to panels at the Musée du Petit Palais in Avignon, the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, and the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge, MA.
- 42 According to Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*, 281, n. 71, the Madonna had been appreciated as an exorcist since the fifth century.
- 43 The inscription, which is not wholly intact, reads: "It should be known that I, Giovanni from Milan, was possessed by the demons for one year; blessed by a priest, I was liberated from them with great efforts. My mother and my brother recommended me to Santa Maria di Loreto and Madonna del Monte of Cesena.... I was requested to go.... For one year to manifest this miracle; to bring a silver chalice to each of these Madonnas and to pay for masses to be recited in Loreto for those who ..."
- 44 Although distanced from Loreto by some 450 kilometers, Milan might have had a copy of the renowned Madonna of Loreto as did other places. This would have enabled the ritual to have been performed in the visual presence of at least one of Zuane's intercessors.
- 45 Maggi, *Satan's Rhetoric*, 11. Hilaire Kallendorf, "The Rhetoric of Exorcism," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 23 (2005), 209, also notes, "While it is true that these texts are a synthesis compiled from Biblical, liturgical, and other sources, they also bear distinctive features" that suggest their authors had some fluency with the oratorical strategies of epideictic discourse.

- 46 Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 149.
- 47 Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 236; and Schutte, *Aspiring Saints*, 267, n. 20. Caciola provides a penetrating and invaluable analysis of exorcism that includes in chapter 5, “Exorcizing Demonic Disorder,” 225–73, a brief history and a sampling of passages from exorcism manuals. Also see Danilo Zardin, “La ‘religione popolare’: Interpretazioni, istorigrafiche e ipotesi di ricerca,” in *Arte, religione, e comunità in Italia rinascimentale e barocca: atti di convegno di studi sul Santuario del Beato Vergine dei Miracoli di Saronno*, ed. Lucia Saccardo and Danilo Zardin (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2000), 3–24.
- 48 Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *Malleus maleficarum* (1486), trans. Montague Summers (New York: Dover, 1971), 185–86.
- 49 Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 237 and 225.
- 50 The reference to conjuring cobblers refers to the case against “Camillo and Danese, shoemakers, and Cassandra of Ferrara and others” brought before the papal magistrates in January 1559. See Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 201–41.
- 51 O’Neil, “*Sacerdote ovvero strione*,” 53–83; and Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe*.
- 52 Schutte, *Aspiring Saints*, 114, additionally notes, “To eliminate abuses, Federico Borromeo, archbishop of Milan, among others, had proposed stationing ‘public exorcists’ in churches dedicated to saints specializing in liberating the possessed.” Also see Moshe Sluhovskiy, “The Devil in the Convent,” *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 1379–1411.
- 53 Menghi did not write solely about demonology. *Tesoro celeste della gloriosa Madre di Dio Maria Vergine. Nel quale si ragiona del vero culto, & adoratione, che si deve alle sacrosante immagini* (Bologna: Gio. Rossi, 1607), includes a discussion on thaumaturgic images, including the Madonna of SS. Annunziata, Florence (cap. 18, 151).
- 54 O’Neil, “*Sacerdote ovvero strione*,” 74, cites as an example the defense offered by Fra Basileo of Parma.
- 55 If the possessed was of rank or too ill, exorcism was allowed in the home. *Rituale Romanum Pauli Quinti pontificis maximi jussus editum* (Venice: Balleoniana, 1726), 358–61. The same general rules for exorcism apply today. See <http://santamissa.org/en/resources/books-1962/rituale-romanum/57a-exorcism-generalrules>, accessed June 9, 2008.
- 56 Like the ritual itself, the *stola* was singled out for mockery as a sign of superstition. See Richard Holbrook, “Exorcism with a Stole: Illustrated by Examples in the Farce of *Maître Pierre Pathelin*, in *Li jus Adan*, and in the Fableau entitled *Estula*,” *Modern Language Notes*, 19 (1904), 235–37.
- 57 Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft: wherein the lewde dealing of witches and witchmongers is notablie detected* (London: William Brome, 1584), bk. 15, chap. 22; and Heinrich Bullinger, *Wider die Schwartzzen Künst, Aberglaubigs segnen, unwarhafftigs Warsagen, und andere der gleichen von Gott verboten Künst*, in *Theatrum de veneficis: Das ist: Von Teufelsgespenst, Zaubern und Giffbereitern, Schwartzkünstlern, Hexen und Unholden, vieler fürnemmen Historien und Exempel* (Frankfurt a. M.: Nicholas Bassaeus, 1586), 301.
- 58 Martin Luther, “Das Taufbüchlein aufs Neue zugerichtet” (1526), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vols. 1– (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883), 19:539–41. For the association of baptism and exorcism, see Bodo Nischan, “The Exorcism Controversy and Baptism in the Late Reformation,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 18 (1987), 31–52.
- 59 Förner, *Panoplia armorum Dei*, 1626, as cited in Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 233–34.
- 60 Lorraine Daston, “Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe,” *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1991), 101.
- 61 Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 220.
- 62 *Acta Conciliorum et epistolae decretales, ac constitutiones Summorum Pontificum*, 10: cols. 1953–54.
- 63 Gaetano Moroni Romano, *Dizionario di Erudizione Storico-Ecclesiastica* (Venice: Tipografia Emiliana, 1855), 71:54–73.
- 64 For the definition of superstition in the *Vocabolario*, see http://vocabolario.sism.it/_s_index2, accessed April 24, 2012. Also see Domino Du Change, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*, 7 vols. (Paris: Didot Fratres, 1846), 6:450. For the history of superstition through the thirteenth century, see Dieter Harmening, *Superstitio: Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-*

- theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters* (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1979), esp. 33–42; and for a more general survey, Mary R. O’Neil, “Superstition,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 16 vols., ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 14:163–66.
- 65 For the trial transcript, see Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*, 201–41, and for the reference to the *tavoletta*, 211. A second saddler, Camillo, was also brought before the magistrates. He reported (207–8) the situation that led to the arrest. “I chanced to be in the shop of maestro Marco, a shoemaker” when maestro Agostino “said that he was ruined because for three years he had had a wife who was possessed. He had tried three cures that are required in such affairs, taking her to St. Peter’s, to San Giovanni, and to the Popolo” but it had not helped. He additionally states his attempt to urge the poor husband to “Turn to the arms of Jesus Christ, and to the Madonna.” His testimony spared him the pain of torture. Danese was not so fortunate.
- 66 Pictures, like words, are nothing but signs signifying something for someone: “Signis autem non utuntur nisi ad alios intelligentes.” In effect, they direct a request to the absent power. Sylvester Prierio, as cited in Maggi, *Satan’s Rhetoric*, 33.
- 67 Although Menghi suggested the use of saints’ relics and crucifixes, he cautioned practitioners about them. If a supposed relic was not authentic, he warned, then its failure to affect a cure would prompt ridicule by the devil and a loss of faith by the demoniac. Girolamo Menghi, *Compendio dell’arte essorcistica et possibilita delle mirabilis: Estupende operationi delli demoni & de’ malefici* (Bologna: Giovanni Rossi, 1578), 36–37.
- 68 St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, II.20.30–31, trans. J. F. Shaw (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 646–47.
- 69 Smith, “The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present,” 13.
- 70 St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. J. F. Shaw, 646.
- 71 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 40, *Superstition and Irreverence*, ed. Thomas F. O’Meara and Michael J. Duffy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5 (2a2ae 92, article 1). The characterization of superstition as “religion’s opposite” is in the subsequent article.
- 72 Smith, “The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present,” 20.
- 73 Guazzo, *Compendium maleficarum*, bk. 2, chap. 11, 123.
- 74 Martin Luther, *Works*, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Christopher B. Brown (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–86), 40:167–68.
- 75 Jean Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Palémon Glorieux (Paris: Desclée, 1960–), 8 (1971), sect. 37–8, 108–9.
- 76 O’Neil, “Magical Healing,” 91. Ferber, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern France*, 10, noted the following: The “capacity for divine power to be displayed in sacramental forms [she labels exorcism a sacrament] has always been of mixed value for the Church. It allows for the penetration of holiness into daily life, in holy places, objects, rituals, persons living or dead, and at special times. Yet the very diffusion of this form of religiosity is also a risk to authority in the Church, because it allows for a degree of innovation to take place at the local level, or within specific interest groups.”
- 77 For a detailed discussion of the case, see Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 57–69. A similar but perhaps more damning case was that of Caterina di Agostino, who, “motivated by a diabolical spirit” in 1375, resorted to puncturing a similarly fashioned wax figure with iron nails, which she then placed in a bed in her house to which she led Paolo di Michele Rondinelli. See *The Society of Renaissance Florence: A Documentary Study*, ed. Gene Bruckner (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 260.
- 78 The list is long and growing. Seminal studies include: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); O’Neil, “Discerning Superstition”; O’Neil, “Magical Healing, Love Magic and the Inquisition in Late Sixteenth-Century Modena”; O’Neil, “*Sacerdote ovvero strione*,” 53–83; Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Scribner, “The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the ‘Disenchantment of the

- World”; Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*; Sluhovsky, *Believe Not Every Spirit*; and Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*.
- 79 Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 59.
- 80 Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie*, 1231–32.
- 81 Maggi, *Satan’s Rhetoric*, 111, 116; and Kallendorf, “The Rhetoric of Exorcism,” 209. This belief was notoriously confirmed by Werner of Freiburg, who claimed the phrase “verbum caro factum est” would force the devil into retreat. See Robert E. Lerner, “Werner of Freiburg intrappolato dalla legge,” in *La parola all’accusato*, ed. Jean-Claude Marie Vigueur and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani (Palermo: Sellerio, 1991), 280.
- 82 Both list samplings comes from Menghi’s “Exorcism by Fire” in *Flagellum daemonum*.
- 83 Menghi, *Flagellum daemonum*, 154 and 157, and Girolamo Menghi, *The Devil’s Scourge: Exorcism during the Italian Renaissance (1529–1609)*, trans. and commentary Gaetano Paxia (Boston: Weiser Books, 2002), 149 and 151.
- 84 Montaigne, *Journal de voyage en Italie*, 1219.
- 85 The chronicle is in Prague University National Library. See Andre Vauchez, Barrie Dobson, and Michael Lapidge, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, trans. Adrian Walford (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), 1:707. While the devil-emblazoned miter appears most often in representations of Hus, a sheet in the Constance Rosgartenmuseum pictures it unembellished.
- 86 Marisa Milani, “Il caso di Emilia Catena ‘meretrice, striga et herbera,’” *Museum Patavinum*, 3 (1985), 75 and 91.
- 87 Michele Catalano, *Vita di Ludovico Ariosto* (Geneva: Olschki, 1930), 106, “una mitra in capo, ov’erano dipinti alcuni diavoli.” For a discussion of the practice of forced running, see Deanna Shemek, *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 35–37.
- 88 Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, 122.
- 89 Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* [1603] as cited in Stephen Greenblatt, “Loudun and London,” *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1986), 339.
- 90 *Mémoires de Jacques du Clercq*, in *Collection des chroniques nationales française ... avec notes et éclaircissements*, ed. Frédéric-Auguste-Ferdinand-Thomas Reiffenberg (Paris: J. A. Buchon, 1826–27), 39:18–19. “... d’une mitre ou estoit peinct la figure du Diable en telle maniere qu’ils avoient confessé lui avoir fait hommaige; et eux à genoux, peicts devant le Diable.” I am indebted to Jessica Roussanov who so generously brought this passage to my attention. A similar spectacle of presentation and devil emblazoned miter wearing is recorded as having taken place in Douai in 1420 and, several months after the Arras incident, in Lille. See Jessica J. Roussanov, “The Kings, the Dukes and the *Arrageois*: State Building and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Arras,” Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 2009, 103–4.
- 91 Moucharde was ordered to make a pilgrimage in penance for her misbehavior. Presumably, it was prostitution and not witchcraft.
- 92 *Acta Conciliorum et epistolae decretales, ac constitutiones Summorum Pontificum*, 10: col. 1954.
- 93 Paleotti, *Discorso*, in *Trattati*, ed. Barocchi, 2:197–200.

AFTERWORD

- 1 Timothy Kelly and Joseph Kelly, “Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Gender Roles, and the Decline of Devotional Catholicism,” *Journal of Social History*, 32 (1998), <http://www.questia.com/reder/print>, accessed on May 3, 2007.
- 2 Daniel Wojcik, “‘Polaroids from Heaven’: Photography, Folk Religion, and the Miraculous Image Tradition at a Marian Apparition Site,” *Journal of American Folklore*, 109 (1996), 129–48.
- 3 Wojcik, “‘Polaroids from Heaven,’” 129.
- 4 Wojcik, “‘Polaroids from Heaven,’” 131; Don Yoder, “Towards a Definition of Folk Religion,” *Western Folklore*, 33 (1974), 2–15.
- 5 Small, “Believing in Art,” 294.
- 6 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ex voto: images, organs, temps* (Paris: Bayard, 2006), 9–10.
- 7 Small, “Believing in Art,” 296.
- 8 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981), 87.
- 9 Wojcik, “‘Polaroids from Heaven,’” 138.
- 10 Antonella Pampalone, “Gli ex voto del Santuario di Gallinaro Riflessioni sui rapporti fra imagine culta e imagine popolare,” *La Ricerca Folklorica*, 24 (1991), 83–89.
- 11 Maniura, “Ex Votos, Art and Pious Performance,” 418.

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Plate 1. Lorenzo Monaco, *Intercession of Christ and the Virgin*, circa 1395–1402. Tempera on canvas. New York, Metropolitan Museum, Cloisters collection. (Photo: Art Resource, New York)



Plate 2. *Pilgrims at the Tomb of St. Margaret*, detail, school of Turino Vanni, *St. Margaret Altarpiece*, circa 1400. Tempera on panel. Vatican City, Pinacoteca, Vatican Museum. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, New York)



Plate 3. Antonio Orsini (attrib.), votive panel of Suor Sara of Ferrara, 1432. Tempera on panel. Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs. (Photo: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris/Jean Tholance tous droits reserves)

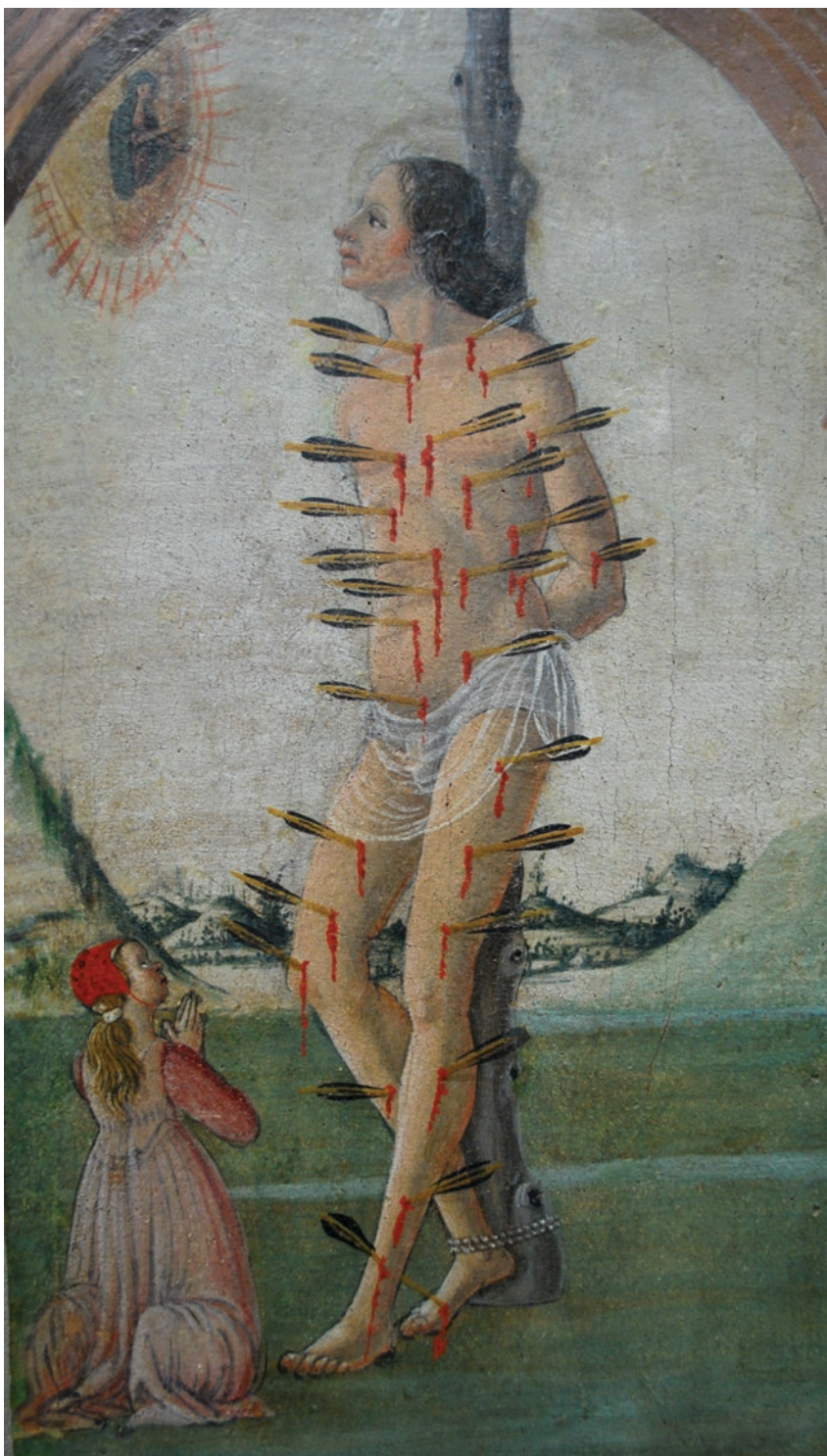


Plate 4. Anonymous, votary with St. Sebastian, *tavoletta votiva* offered to the Madonna del Monte, Cesena, second half of the fifteenth century. Tempera on panel. (Photo: author)



Plate 5. Anonymous, child injured by scissors, *tavoletta votiva* offered to the Madonna dei Miracoli, Lonigo, late fifteenth century. Tempera on panel. (Photo: with kind permission of Santa Maria dei Miracoli)



Plate 6. Fresco cycle by Pietro da Rimini, Grand Chapel, Basilica of San Nicola, Tolentino, begun circa 1312 and completed circa 1325/30, Giorgio Orsino di Sebenco, cenotaph, 1477. (Photo: author)



Plate 7. Anonymous, exorcism of Chiara da Camerino, *tavoletta votiva* offered to Nicholas of Tolentino, October 8, 1589. Tempera on panel. Tolentino, Basilica of San Nicola. (Photo: author)



Plate 8. Anonymous, Giovan Zayra suffers rope hoist, *tavoletta votiva* offered to the Madonna dell'Arco, Sant'Anastasia (Naples), 1599. Tempera on panel. (Photo: with kind permission of the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell'Arco)

